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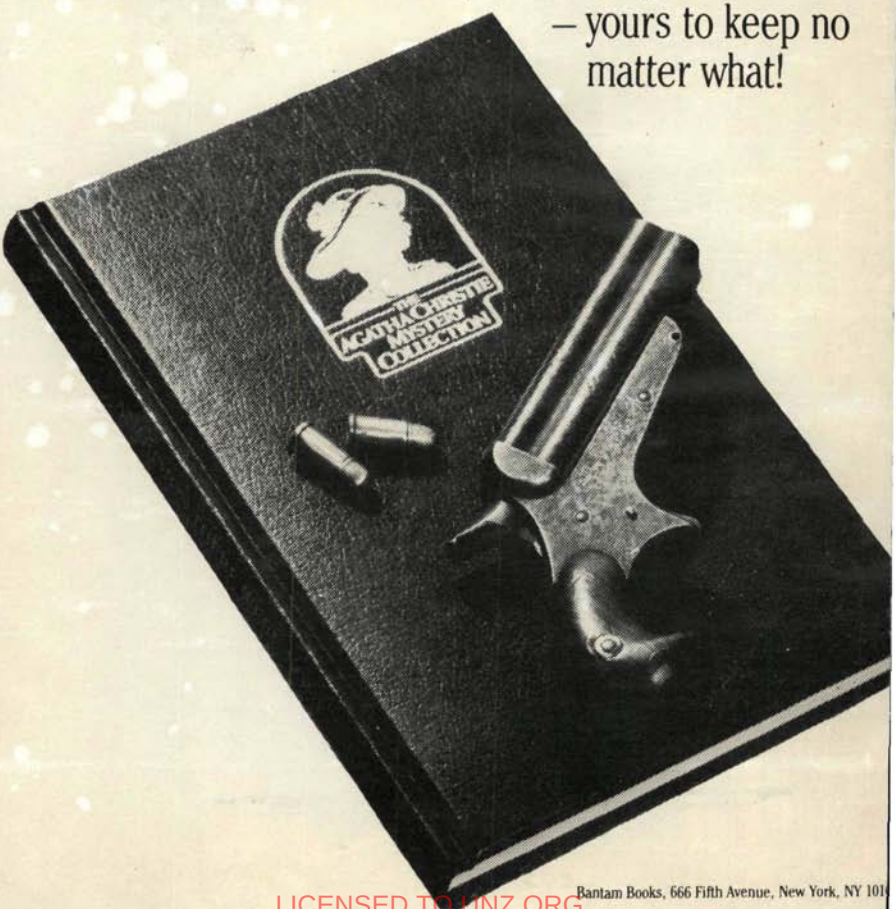

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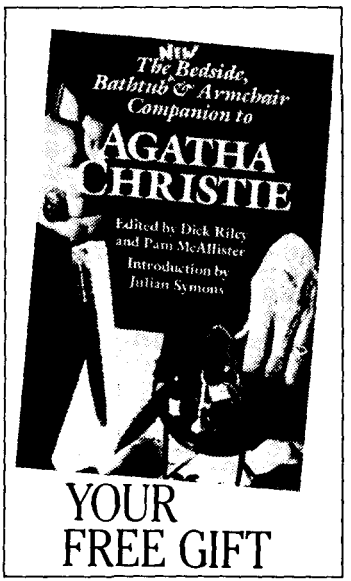
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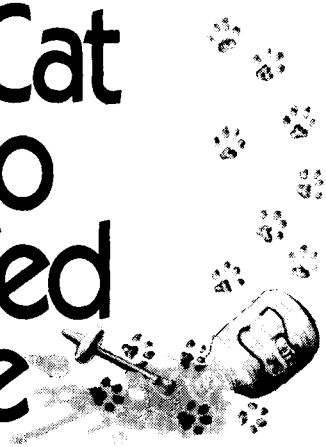

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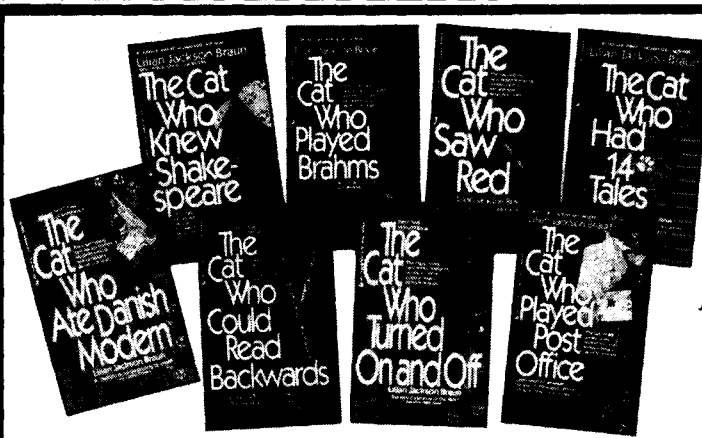
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On our cover is
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a ***NEW*** **short story by**

DOUG ALLYN

Doyle said, "Look, I'll make it simple for you, Punkin. You and Monk are the best friends I ever had, but if you walk on me now, I swear I'll go up to Nashville and burn your house, take a chainsaw to your wife and kids, and shotgun your damn dog. Swear on my mama's grave."

"Your mama's still alive," Monk said, unimpressed.

"She'll be the first to go."

"Well," Punkin said reluctantly, "I guess we can hang on till after the Jam. For your mama's sake."

Doug Allyn's first short story, "Final Rites," published in Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, *won the 1985 Robert L. Fish Award. His "The Puddle Diver" (also in* AHMM*) was nominated for an Edgar in 1986. He has now sold about a dozen stories, but this scorching look at redneck saloon society is his first in* EQMM *and his first about the music business he knows well. It is a story that excited us when we first read it, excited us when we edited it, and excited us when we proofread it. We envy you your first go-round . . .*

A DEATH IN HEAVEN

by ***DOUG ALLYN***

The Dark Angels were smokin', jamming on a hard-rock version of B. B. King's "Rock Me," when Doyle spotted a cop pushing through the crowd at the far end of the club. He glanced across the stage, trying to catch Punkin's eye, but the pudgy, red-bearded guitarist was totally lost in his solo, playing like a man on fire, hammering out Telecaster pyrotechnics at Godzilla volume. A second

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cop hustled through the main entrance, then two more, and the crowd began to churn around them, turning away from the stage. Not just a roust, then—something was definitely up.

Doyle whirled, his back to the audience, and flashed a quick hitchhiker's thumb at Punkin and the rest of the band, a signal to take it out, to end the set on this song. Punkin nodded, then duckwalked to the footlights and dropped to his knees, showboating for the swaying, sweat-drenched mob packed like lemmings against the edge of the rough-pine platform. Doyle let Punkin wail through two extra choruses, grinning as the Pillsbury Doughboy in ragged denims raised the energy level in the room to near rock'n'roll orgasm.

A propane cannon fired a few feet from Punkin, scorching him as the sheet of flame blew fifteen feet in the air, and a followspot focused momentarily on Doyle, an unsubtle reminder from Monk up in the spotlight-rigging that they hadn't *rehearsed* the song this way. Punkin leapt to his feet, gave Doyle a nod, and they ripped into the last chorus together, lead guitar and Fender bass ricocheting through the changes with icepick precision, driving the tune like a locomotive, then stopping it—sharp as a razor cut, dead-silent for a dozen heartbeats—then collapsing it like an avalanche on the howling crowd, drumthunder and guitar feedback melding with a Niagara roar of applause.

"Doyle Beaudine and the Dark Angels!!! Let's hear it! The Angels!" Monk's amplified announcement was barely audible above the cheers and rebel yells of the mob. The crowd was whistling and stamping, hoping for an encore. Doyle stepped to the mike, raised his arm in a clenched-fist salute, and gave a roof-raising rebel yell of his own.

"Yo, gang! We sure wanna thank you for comin' out tonight, hope y'all had a righteous time. Stop by again and bring a friend. Hell, bring ten! And remember, any time you're in Dixie, Heaven ain't far away. Y'all come back, hear?"

He stepped back from the mike, pumping his fist, nodding at the whoops and applause that echoed through the cavernous old building like a cavalry charge in an oil drum. Then Monk killed the stage lights and punched in an early Stones tape, "Honky Tonk Women." End of show.

Doyle unstrapped his custom-carved Fender electric bass and tossed it to Punkin. "Something's wrong up front," he said, "cops."

"T.J.'ll handle 'em. She always does."

"This is more'n the usual hassle. There's three or four of 'em. You

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guys shut down the gear, I'll check things out." He vaulted off the stage and began pushing through the crowd toward the front entrance. It was a long walk. The Rock'n'Roll Heaven Saloon was a converted aircraft hangar—concrete floors, high corrugated-metal roof supported by a steel-truss framework, a crude concert stage at one end of the building, a bar at the other. A mob was clustered around the office just inside the arena entrance, held in check by three Noxapater County deputies with drawn nightsticks. Doyle muscled through.

And stopped. Sumo, the club's three-hundred-pound bouncer, was on his knees beside the office door, wrists handcuffed, blood streaming from a gash in his scalp. The door was ajar, its lock mechanism trashed, obviously kicked in. An officer was prowling around inside.

"Hold it, buddy." One of the deputies grabbed Doyle's arm as he knelt beside Sumo.

"Be cool," Doyle said, shrugging off the cop's grasp, "the guy works for me, okay?" He winced as he raised Sumo's chin. The pallid giant's mongoloid features were a tear-streaked crimson mask. Doyle gently cupped Sumo's cheek for a moment, then rose slowly. "What the hell's going on here?"

"Is that Beaudine out there?" Lieutenant Lamar Cooper opened the office door. They were of a size, Cooper and Doyle, both rangy six footers, but a contrast in style, Cooper in a smartly pressed khaki uniform, Doyle in sunglasses, jeans, and a leather vest, his arms ornately tattooed from his shoulders to his wrists. "Come on in, Doyle," Cooper said, stepping aside, "and congratulations."

"For what?" Doyle pushed through the doorway—and froze, stunned. Carnage. Terry was lolled back in the swivel chair behind her desk, her dark eyes wide with surprise, a crimson spatter-pattern on the wall behind her head, bone chips and cerebral tissue visible through a massive gouge in her temple. A goateed Latin in a fawn-suede suit was crumpled on the floor beside the desk, his vest blotched by two ugly holes above his heart. The room wavered a moment, flickering like a cheap film. Doyle felt the doorframe bite into his shoulder and he clutched it, trying to keep from going down. Cooper's voice garbled into Mick Jagger's, ranting from the speakers mounted in the office ceiling.

"What?" Doyle managed, his jaw clamped against the surge of bile in his throat.

"You okay, Beaudine? You look a little pale. I asked if you know the guy on the floor."

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"Esquivel," Doyle said, "his name's Esquivel. Reynaldo, something like that."

"Cuban, right? Boatlifter? He's got tattoos on his eyelids. *Te vi.* Means I see you in Mex. Only he ain't seein' squat now. What did him and Terry have goin'? Other'n blowin' each other away."

"I don't know. I only met him once."

"Was he her pusher? Or maybe a gigolo? He's pretty enough, I guess. Would'na thought Ol' Terry'd need to pay for it yet, though. Unless she got off on dark meat—"

Spiderwebs. On snow. Hazy. Doyle frowned, trying to bring the pattern into focus. Ceiling tile. He was in bed, looking up at a ceiling. Hard bed. Antiseptic tang.

Hospital. The plane had gone down— No, that was years ago. When he got burned. Lost his eye. And then a vision hammered into his consciousness. The office. Terry and the Cuban. My God.

He must have moaned aloud. A wizened nurse with a strawberry beehive hairdo peered through the doorway, smiled, and padded softly to his bedside on foam-soled shoes.

"Welcome back," she said. "How do you feel?"

"Th—" He swallowed a fist-sized cotton boll. "Terrible."

"I'm not surprised. You've been away for a while."

"A while? What time is it?"

"Almost noon," she said gently, holding his wrist, taking his pulse, "but I'm afraid you've lost a day. It's Monday."

She gazed intently into his right eye, checking for dilation. He looked away. And noticed his glass eye in a jar on the nightstand. He started to reach for it and realized his right hand was bandaged. And his left wrist was handcuffed to the bedframe.

"Can I get you anything?" the nurse asked.

"Yeah," Doyle said, frowning at the cuffs, "some orange juice, please. And my lawyer."

"It must have been quite a sight," Artis De Vol said quietly, "two dead bodies, you've got Cooper on the floor, Quentin clips you with his nightstick, and your left eyeball pops out. All this in front of roughly three hundred outraged witnesses. I'm almost sorry we can't sue."

"What's the bottom line?" Doyle asked. He felt better, but not much, like he'd been head-butting with Amtrak.

"Assaulting a police officer, aggravated battery on an officer, in-

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terference in an official investigation, resisting arrest," Artis recited, ticking off the charges on his blunt fingertips. The black attorney's nails were reddened, gnawed to the quick, his polyester suit was straight off the Salvation Army rack, and he looked as exhausted as Doyle felt. "I may have missed a couple, but it doesn't matter. I think I can cut a deal with Sheriff Lee to swap 'em all if we'll drop our brutality suit."

"What about Sumo?"

"They got him stitched up and cut him loose. Lee didn't charge him with anything."

"Why did they hit him? What happened?"

"I don't know, Doyle. The coroner's inquest is this afternoon, maybe we'll find out something then. I contacted Terry's folks in St. Pete, they said they'd notify everyone, which'll be a pretty good trick. How many times was she married?"

"Twice at least, maybe three times. Coupla kids, I think. What happens to Heaven now?"

"Nothing good. Sheriff Lee's requested a hearing with the county commissioners on Friday to close the club as a public nuisance. I'll represent you and the heirs, of course, but I can tell you right now, we don't have much of a chance."

"Even rats usually wait until the ship's going down, Artis."

"I'm not jumping ship. Terry hired me when nobody else in this town would, so I'll stick, but Noxapater's not Atlanta, Doyle. Terry's name gave the club a certain—cachet. Without her, it's just a freak show at an abandoned airfield. And people around here are conservative. The commissioners will probably vote to close you down."

"For which I may thank 'em," Doyle sighed. "Meantime, why don't you try and bust me out of here?"

"Mr. Beaudine?" The cop was so tall he had to duck through the door, gaunt as a prophet, silver hair in a boot-camp brushcut, steel-rimmed glasses, oversized, red-knuckled paws. "I'm Sheriff Clayton Lee. You feel up to a little conversation?"

"Will I need my lawyer?"

"I can fetch Mr. De Vol if you like, but I don't believe it's necessary."

"How about these handcuffs?" Doyle said, tugging his wrist against the chain. "Are they necessary?"

"They're required under the law, Mr. Beaudine. You're charged

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with four felonies—but, ah, if you'll give me your word not to attempt an escape—?"

Doyle couldn't tell whether he was kidding or not. It was like trying to read Mt. Rushmore. "How about scout's honor?"

"If that's the best you can do," Lee nodded. He unlocked the cuffs and eased down on the white-plastic chair beside the bed. "First, let me offer you my condolences, Mr. Beaudine, on the death of your partner. And my apology for the—incident afterward. Deputy Cooper shouldn't have spoken disrespectful of the dead, but I doubt he'll do it again for a while. Jaw's wired shut. Broken in three places."

"Is that a fact? Well, if you're waitin' for me to apologize, you'd best make yourself comfortable. You'll be here a while."

"I'm more interested in what you can tell me about the man who died with Miss Canaday. Esquivel."

"I don't know much about him. He was from Atlanta, I think, came out to see Terry a few times."

"Were they lovers, Mr. Beaudine?"

"I doubt it. He never stayed long. And Terry didn't have much of a private life. She—lived in one of the bungalows at the field."

"*Business*, then?"

"Possibly, but not necessarily. Terry was a big star once. She knew a lot of people—all kinds."

"It didn't trouble you, her seeing him? I understand you two were involved once."

"I don't see where that's any of your business."

"I'm afraid it is now, Mr. Beaudine. If you want to walk out of here anytime soon. So, if you don't mind—?"

Doyle eyed him a moment, then shrugged. "We had a fling once," he conceded, "but it was years ago. I was a young punk on my way up and Terry was already a big star. Ships in the night, stayed friends after, but nothin' heavy. Then in 'eighty-one I got—busted up in a plane crash. Lost everything—my eye, most of my band, my whole life, really. Went home to Louisiané afterward—St. Rose. Bought a place back in the bayou, no electricity, no radio. Tried to become my own grampaw. About six months ago, Terry shows up. Offered me half interest in an abandoned airfield in Noxapater, Georgia. Wanted to turn it into a nightclub."

"And that struck you as a good idea?"

"Hell, no. It was a terrible idea. But Terry was an elemental force.

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She—" Doyle swallowed and looked away. "Look, do you, ah, have any idea what happened?"

"Apparently Miss Canaday and Esquivel had a falling out and killed one another. The door was locked and your bouncer refused to let my men in."

"So they roughed him up?"

"They'd been told there had been shots fired and the man wouldn't move. They had no choice."

"No, I suppose not. Sumo's a bit—slow. A good doorman, but sometimes he follows orders too well."

"In any case, Cooper had to kick the door in, and—well, you know what he found. The gun that killed Esquivel, a Browning .380 automatic, was it Miss Canaday's gun?"

"She kept one in her desk—" Doyle nodded "—and she knew how to use it. On weekends we do a lot of business and we're out in the middle of nowhere, no offense. You said they had a falling out. Any idea what it was about?"

Lee stared at him a moment, then rose, towering over the bed like an archangel. "I think you know what it was about, Mr. Beaudine. It was about drugs. Cocaine, I imagine."

"No. It couldn't have been. Back in the 'seventies, Terry blew her career on coke, took a header off a stage in Vegas while she was stoned—she'd been limping ever since. She was dead set against drugs, hated pushers. It had to be something else."

"Reynaldo Esquivel was a Marielito, *escoria*, scum," Lee said coldly. "He had two drug-related busts in New York, another in Florida, and recently he was doing business in Atlanta. I think they were making a deal in that office and it came undone. And you were her partner, weren't you, Mr. Beaudine?"

"You're wrong," Doyle said, sitting up slowly, "about me, but especially about Terry. You're dead-ass wrong, Mr. Lee, and this conversation is over."

"It's a moot point now," Lee said, taking his time about getting out of the room. "She's dead, and you're going to be out of business shortly. You seem like a nice enough fella, Mr. Beaudine, but I don't like your music, or the people it attracts, and I find the idea of callin' a saloon Heaven personally offensive. Take some advice from an ol' country boy. Quit while you're behind and get out. Or you may be stayin' in my country a damnsight longer than you care to."

Doyle hesitated a moment after he stepped into the club, waiting

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for his vision to adjust to the dimness. After the brilliance of the north Georgia afternoon, the saloon had a dank, subterranean ambience. The jukebox was thumping out a Hank, Jr., tune, the air was hazy with secondhand smoke and the stench of stale beer. Heaven. The front bar was busy, packed with the usual flannel-shirt types plus a few tourists. Mama Nancy, the halo-haired barrel of a barmaid, was hustling up and down the rough oak bar as fast as her seventy-year-old stumps could move.

"Jeesuz H. Christ, either the dogs've run a bear in here, or Doyle's back." Punkin Clifford dumped his pool cue into the rack and stalked over, his doughy face split in a grin.

"Doyle?" Monk McKay growled. "Seems to me I do recall a gator-bait Cajun singer by that name. Been away, has he?" The wiry, gap-toothed road manager scowled as the 4-ball caromed off the rail. With his freckled, open-apple-pie face, he looked like Huck Finn's surly older brother. "Must be Doyle," he muttered, "my game's gone bad."

"What's the occasion?" Doyle said, glancing around. "Mama Nancy giving out free samples, or what?"

"Thing's been jumpin' since Saturday night," Punkin said. "Had some reporters first couple days, but Sumo didn't like some of their questions'n ran 'em off. How you doin'?"

"I'll do," Doyle said. "Where's the rest of the band?"

Punkin and Monk exchanged glances. "They split," Monk said. "Went back to Atlanta."

"What do you mean split?" Doyle said. "We got the Fourth of July show coming up on Monday."

"Well, hell, Doyle—" Punkin shrugged "—Terry's gone, you're in the hospital, word is the cops're gonna close the place. They figured this gig's history, man, and Hezekiah wanted to see his old lady. Me'n Monk decided to hang loose a few days, see what you wanted to do, but—"

"I'll tell you what I want to do. Exactly what we came here for. Make a place where we can play what we want, rebuild our rep enough to get a record deal, and climb back up on top."

"What's all this?" Monk frowned. "Look, I know you got a piece of this place, but the way things are lookin', it's time to be movin' on."

"I can't do that. Not now. We've got the Nox-Rox July Jam scheduled Monday, with five bands booked, and every last dime in the club kitty laid out for advertising and construction. If we cancel

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now, the penalties and legal hassles'll eat what's left of this place and Terry's kids'll end up stuck with the tab. And that's just not right."

"Maybe not," Punkin said, looking away, "but life's a bitch sometimes. Look, Doyle, I've already made a few calls. You'n me and Monk can hook up with Joe South's roadshow—"

"Damnit, I'm not leaving! When Terry conned me into comin' up here, she saved my life. I owe her. And so do you. And I don't figure the three of us been bustin' our butts all this time to end up playin' backup for Joe friggin' South."

"But if they close us down at that hearing—"

"And what if they don't? Look, I'll make it simple for you, Punkin. You and Monk are the best friends I ever had, but if you walk on me now, I swear I'll go up to Nashville and burn your house, take a chainsaw to your wife and kids, and shotgun your damn dog. Swear on my mama's grave."

"Your mama's still alive," Monk said, unimpressed.

"She'll be the first to go."

"Well," Punkin said reluctantly, "I guess we can hang on till after the Jam. For your mama's sake."

"Thank you. I appreciate it. Now why don't you get on the horn and get Teddy and Hezekiah back here. We got some serious rehearsin' to do."

Reefer. Doyle whiffed the tang of marijuana smoke the moment he stepped into the concert arena at the rear of the club. Shafts of light, as hard and bright as chrome steel, glared down from the narrow vents high above the concrete floor, crisscrossing the room like the bars of a cell. The area was kept closed during the week to save on air-conditioning, and in the light of day it looked exactly like what it was, a rattletrap aircraft hangar pretending to be a concert hall, tarted up with posters like an over-the-hill hooker in mudcake makeup, hoping for one last trick. The tarp-covered equipment and skeletal mike-stands onstage added to the air of abandonment. And yet—reefer.

Doyle stalked to the office, pushed open the shattered door, and flicked on the lights. A cowboy, wearing a flat-brimmed grey Stetson and matching denims, was sitting in Terry's chair, his snakeskin Tony Lama boots resting on the desk. He was hatchet-faced, with an incongruous Magnum moustache that failed to conceal a deep

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scar on his upper lip, the mark of a cleft palate, perhaps. Or a serious punch in the mouth.

"Afternoon," he said, offering the joint to Doyle. "Care for a toke? Black Lebanese, bomb weed, gar-on-tee."

Doyle accepted the reefer stub, dropped it, and ground it out on the floor. "Who the hell are you and what are you doing in here?"

"My name's Tucker," the cowboy said, rising, offering his hand, "Brodie Tucker, and I guess you could say I belong here. I'm your new partner—or one of 'em, anyway."

"My, my, when somethin' dies, it doesn't take long for the critters to crawl out, does it? Well, whatever you're sellin', Mr. Tucker, I'm not buying, so—"

"I'm not selling anything, Mr. Beaudine. We already bought. I'm one of the late Mr. Esquivel's associates. You remember him, do ya? Tall fella, nice tan? Tattooed eyelids?"

"I remember him," Doyle said, picking up the aluminum baseball bat from behind the door, "and you've got three seconds to beat feet outta here, Tucker. After that, you're gonna need help."

"That's bold talk for a one-eyed guitar player, Mr. Beaudine," Tucker said blandly, easing a snubnosed .38 out of his jacket, holding it loosely at his side. "Now be cool, and let's talk this over like gentlemen, okay?"

"We've got nothing to talk about."

"We got a hundred thousand things to talk about, Beaudine, all dollars. The money your partner killed Esquivel for."

"You're out of your tree. Terry didn't—"

"Sure she did," Tucker said flatly. "I was at the coroner's inquest yesterday. He said Rey caught two in the ticker and Miz Canaday had half her head blown off. It don't take Perry Mason to figure who fired first. She did. And he did for her while he was checkin' out."

"Look, all I know is they're both dead. I don't know squat about any hundred grand or any deal. The only money in the office was from the till."

"Won't wash, Doyle," Tucker said, shaking his head, moving around the desk to face him. "I know Esquivel had the bread, saw my boss hand him the briefcase myself. Far as we're concerned, the deal's on, bought and paid for."

"What's bought and paid for?"

"Landing rights," Tucker said coolly. "You got a nice little airfield here, lotsa traffic in an' out on weekends, and just a hop from Miami. Perfect for us. We're lookin' forward to doin' a lotta business here."

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"You're not listening. There was no money, and we don't have a deal."

Tucker's weapon came up in a blur. He jammed the muzzle under Doyle's chin, forcing him back against the wall. And eared back the hammer. "Now listen up, mister bigshot. I don't give a shit how many records you sold back when, you try jerkin' us around you're gonna be playin' with Elvis and them. We paid for a deal. It's on."

"No," Doyle said, swallowing, "no deal."

Tucker held him there, the gun at his throat, for what seemed like a year, so close Doyle could smell his aftershave. And then, slowly, Tucker's face creased in mirthless grin, a wolf-smile at feeding time. "Mr. Beaudine, you are one stubborn coon-ass, you know that? I'd decorate the wall with your brains right now, only I ain't been paid to. Yet. You want me to tell the Man no deal, kiss his hundred grand goodbye? Fine. But if I was you I'd blow the money on a trip to Antarctica or someplace. And even that might not be far enough away, you dig?"

"I don't have the money."

"That ain't our problem. Esquivel had it, that's all we care about. I'll tell my boss what you said, though. And then I'll be back. Meantime, I'll be buyin' up all your old albums, Mr. Beaudine. I figure they're gonna be collector's items real soon."

"Damnit, Doyle, get your head out!" Monk's voice blared from the P.A. system. "Either that or rewrite the damn song. Every time Punkin hits the bridge, you're a bar behind. What's the problem?"

"Sorry—" Doyle sighed "—let's try it one more time and then take a break."

"Wrong," Monk said. "If you blow it again, the song's history, and if you get it right do it a couple more times to make sure it sticks."

"Blow it," Hezekiah told Doyle in an exaggerated stage whisper, "I'm about to melt all over my damn drums."

The Dark Angels had been rehearsing onstage in the stifling afternoon heat of the old hangar for over three hours, rock'n'roll thunder competing with the hammerbangs and whining power saws of the carpenters working backstage on the risers and dressing rooms for the Nox-Rox Jam. Hezekiah Ross had stripped down to his bikini shorts in the first hour, his hard-muscled ebon skin gleaming as though he'd been dipped in oil. Doyle's T-shirt was drenched, his fingers were skidding around his bass neck like butter patties on a griddle, and Teddy Z., the gawky, spike-haired albino, was sagging

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over his keyboards like a question mark. Only Punkin seemed unaffected by the heat, leaning coolly against his battered barstool, playing with icy intensity and accepting Monk's nonstop barrage of constructive abuse as placidly as a Twinkie-sated Zen master.

"Okay, one, two—" Doyle broke off in mid-count. Mama Nancy was waving at him from the doorway, pointing to the office. "Break time," he said quietly. "Looks like I've got company." He parked his bass on its stand, grabbed a three-foot metal mike boom, and vaulted off the stage. Punkin followed, picking up a two-by-four, while Monk scrambled down the ladder to the stage, cursing all the way, and Hezekiah hastily pulled on his pants.

Monk overtook Doyle and Punkin halfway to the office. "Let's take 'em down quick," he said quietly, slapping a lightspar in his palm, "no conversation. We send 'em home in a ambulance, maybe they won't be back."

Doyle hesitated a moment to let Punkin and Monk set themselves, then he kicked open the office door, almost braining a dark-haired young woman in a charcoal-grey dress standing beside the desk. She and her companion, a blond ivy-league Aryan type in a navy pinstriped suit, eyed the armed mob in stunned surprise.

"What are you doing here?" Doyle growled.

"I'm—Lanice Burrows," the girl stammered, "Terry Canaday's daughter. Is something wrong?"

Monk recovered first. "Just a misunderstanding, ma'am. Sorry. My condolences on your mom's death. She was a terrific person. Doyle, we'll be in the bar." He backed out hastily and closed the door behind him.

"Well," the girl said, taking a deep breath, "I take it you're Mr. Beaudine?"

"Yes, ma'am," Doyle nodded, leaning the mike boom against the wall, still staring at her. "Sorry about all that. We've had some trouble."

"So I gather," pinstripe said coldly, "and you may well have more."

"I sure hope not," Doyle sighed. He circled the desk and collapsed into the chair. "I got a plateful already. Who might you be?"

"I'm Herbert Dillard, Miss Burrows' attorney. And friend."

"Mr. Dillard," Doyle said, offering his hand, "any friend of Miss Burrows is a friend of mine. How can I help you folks?"

"You can begin by making all financial accounts relating to this—establishment available to me immediately," Dillard said, ignoring Doyle's hand.

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"Sorry," Doyle said, "I'm afraid I can't."

"I thought you might be—reluctant," Dillard said acidly. "Let me make myself perfectly clear, Mr. Beaudine. I've seen the so-called partnership agreement you made with Miss Canaday, and it struck me as highly irregular. Half interest in a business, with no contribution on your part but your—companionship."

"There was more to it than that."

"I'm sure there was, but perhaps we shouldn't discuss it in the presence of a lady."

"Maybe you're right," Doyle said, uncoiling slowly from the chair, "maybe we ought to step outside and discuss it."

"Is that a threat?"

"Gentlemen, please," Lanice broke in, "we're all under a strain here, but let's not get hormonal, okay? Mr. Beaudine, why can't we see the books?"

"You're welcome to see 'em, I just don't have them here. Artis De Vol, our attorney in Noxapater, handles the accounts. As for that 'companionship' crack, take a good look at me, folks." Doyle took off his sunglasses. "I broke thirty-five last year and I've got more spare parts than a dirt-track racer. Not exactly gigolo material."

"Still," Dillard began, "the agreement—"

"T.J. brought me up here because we were friends once and I needed to work. It was kind of a hobby with her, salvagin' people. But it wasn't charity. I'm a product, Mr. Dillard, like Brillo or Budweiser. My band may not have much of a rep up North, but we're still a strong draw in Dixie. We're pullin' in six, seven hundred people every Saturday. Between the gate and the bar, Heaven's grossing close to seven grand a week, and with luck we'll more than double that over the Fourth. Terry was right, this place is gonna be a gold mine."

"Good. Since it's so profitable, Miss Burrows should have no trouble disposing of her share of the business."

"I'm afraid it's not quite that simple," Doyle said.

"No? Why not?"

"We've got legal problems—a license review coming up in a few days. If they jerk it, we're closed. I can't buy you out myself because every dime I've made so far's been pumped back into the business. I'm afraid for the time bein' you're stuck with half a nightclub, Miss Burrows."

"We'll see about that," Dillard said, taking a notepad out of his vest. "De Vol, you said the man's name was?"

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Doyle nodded. "Artis De Vol. T.J. had some other property in the area, Artis can tell you more about that. Noxapater's a small town and the local motel isn't much. You'll probably want to stay at Terry's bungalow. It's the first one on your right as you enter the gate. Mama Nancy, the barmaid, can give you the key."

"Then we'd best be on our way," Dillard said brusquely. "Lanice?"

"You go ahead, Herb, I want to talk to Mr. Beaudine a moment. Go on, I'll be right along."

She paced slowly around the office after he'd gone, examining the framed posters on the walls—Terry in Vegas, Terry in concert with Tom Jones, Terry with Johnny and Ed on The Tonight Show. Doyle didn't speak, content to watch her. She lacked her mother's metabolic impact, but she was very attractive nonetheless. Her hair was chestnut, where Terry's had been a defiant auburn blaze, and she was slightly smaller, with a glowing Mediterranean complexion, deep, ultramarine eyes. He shook his head sharply. "Was there somethin' you wanted to ask me about, ma'am?"

"A lot of things," she said, without turning. "Too many to know where to begin. —Why did you refer to my mother as T.J. a minute ago? Her middle name was Mariel."

"It's just a nickname she had around here. You know."

"No, I don't. Most of what I know about her I got from *Rolling Stone* or *Creem*. What were the initials for?"

"It was short for—" he coughed "—for, ah, Thunderjugs."

Lanice glanced at him. "I see."

"No, ma'am, I don't think you do. There was no disrespect implied. We're kind of an extended family here, redneck saloon society. And your mom was one of us. The best of us. She was loved."

"I wouldn't know much about family. Or love. She abandoned me, you know."

"I wouldn't put it quite that way. I know your grandparents won custody of you when Terry got heavy into drugs. She bottomed out, with her accident and all, and afterward, well, I think she felt you were better off with them. She did nonstop one-nighters for a couple of years to get a stake, and the road's noplace for a kid. But she cared about you. She sent money every month, and she talked about you a lot."

"Did she? If she cared so much, why haven't I seen her in all these years?"

"I thought you had. She flew up to Cornell last year for your graduation."

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"No," Lanice said firmly, "she wasn't there. Wasn't invited, for that matter."

"Well, she went. I took her to the airport myself."

"If she attended, why didn't she say hello? Or something?"

"I don't know. Maybe she wasn't sure how you'd react. Since she—wasn't invited."

"I doubt she was there at all. And it doesn't make much difference now, does it?"

"Perhaps not, but I, ah—I hope you don't think badly of your mom. She was a special lady. And she did care about you."

"You're a hopeless romantic, Beaudine," she said drily, "T-shirt, tattoos, and all. I'd better go. Herbert's waiting."

"And that troubles you, does it?"

"No," she smiled, "not particularly. Thanks for your time."

"Anytime," he said. "Anytime at all." He saw her out, and watched from the doorway as she slid into the rented Lincoln beside Dillard and drove off. And it was only when he turned to re-enter the club that he realized he wasn't wearing his sunglasses.

He was playing his guitar, strumming along with a Jimi Hendrix tape over the thrum of the engines. The world's highest no-stakes euchre game was underway in back, a bit more subdued than usual without Punkin and Monk, who'd missed the plane again. And then he saw Terry sitting by herself in the forward lounge, just aft of the cockpit. He knew it couldn't be, but it was. By God, it *was!* He tossed the guitar aside and hurried forward, stumbling as the plane lurched a bit.

"Terry," he said, kneeling in the aisle beside her, "it really is you! I'm so glad. I thought—"

"Hello, Beau." She smiled, cupping his cheek with her palm. "Did you think I'd leave without saying goodbye?"

"But, look, Terry, you can't stay here. You have to get off. The plane's going down in a few minutes. They're all going to die. Everybody but me."

"I know," she said softly, "but I wanted to say goodbye."

"No, Terry, please," he pleaded. "You can't stay here. Please go. You'll be hurt."

"But I am hurt. See?" She brushed back her fiery hair with her fingertips, and her temple began to bleed, a thin red stream that trickled down her cheek, and the plane shuddered beneath him as it entered the thunderstorm over Biloxi. He couldn't stop the bleed-

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ing, and Terry's eyes rolled up as she sagged back in the office chair and the engines began to howl—

"Noooooooo!"

Doyle lurched bolt upright in bed, sweat-slick and confused, his heart thudding as though he'd run a marathon, the sheets a sodden tangle about his waist. He sat in the dark a while, concentrating, trying to recapture the moment with Terry. But it wouldn't come. And the anguish of her death settled on him anew, dark as bayou ooze, primordial, suffocating.

He glanced at his travelalarm as he swung his legs out of bed and stood up. One-thirty A.M. It didn't matter. He was awake now, and shaken, sensing Terry's presence in the room as strongly as if she'd just left his bed. And he couldn't dispel the feeling that she was close by, that he could find her if he only knew where to look. He picked up his jeans from the back of the chair and pulled them on.

The compound was still and cool beneath a black Georgia sky, shaded to silver on the horizon by the cityshine of Athens twenty miles to the north. Doyle frowned at the amber glow showing in Terry's bungalow, then noticed the rental Lincoln parked in front. So they'd come back. There were lights on in Punkin's bungalow as well, but Doyle wasn't in the mood for conversation. He wanted Terry. And he could think of only one place she might be.

Heaven was deserted, lit only by the crimson glow of the Exit signs above the doors. Doyle unlocked the front door and moved cautiously through the darkened saloon to the concert-arena entrance. His footsteps echoed hollowly through the hangar, melding with the wind whispers and rustlings, the nightsounds of an old building muttering softly in its sleep. He mounted the empty platform, switched on the footlights, then walked slowly to centerstage and faced a vast, invisible audience, sensing their subsonic murmuring, the restless, expectant energy that would inundate the stage with the first thundering chords.

Here. She would be here. Where she was most alive, the generator/conductor of that raw mob electricity. High priestess and sacrifice on a spotlit altar. They'd talked of it sometimes, lying awake on those long-ago nights after a wall-to-wall show, too wired to sleep, or to make love, afraid of an anticlimax after the adrenalin high of Dr. Stage. The riptides of the business had drowned their relationship, though its embers continued to flicker—with friendship, and an occasional flare of something more. Then the magic of Dr. Stage

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began to wane for Terry. She tried to revive it with drugs and almost destroyed herself. And Doyle's career had ended in the bloody wreckage and torn earth of a Mississippi cottonfield. Or he thought it had until Terry found him again and brought him to this place.

And she was here now, somewhere in the darkness. He could feel her nearness, sensual as the caress of applause. Easing down on Punkin's barstool, he picked up his flattop guitar and began to play, softly strumming a memory, a song they'd sung together all those years ago, filling it with his anguish, hoping to somehow lure her into the light.

And she came. He sensed her presence near the song's end, could almost see her standing in the wings, a silhouette amid the shadows. He continued to play without looking up, afraid she might melt into smoke. And she stepped slowly into the light. Terry. Not lamed and shattered by life, but whole again, as lithe and supple as when they'd first met. He stopped playing, stopped breathing. And she stopped, too. And shimmered, and faded, into her own darker shadow.

"I didn't mean to interrupt," Lanice said quietly. She'd traded her business suit for jeans and an indigo blouse. She looked younger. And vulnerable in a way that Terry never was.

"It's okay. What are you doing here?"

"I couldn't sleep. I saw you come in here. And I wanted to talk to you—to apologize, actually."

"For what?"

"For the way Herb and I behaved this afternoon. We had this image of you, a rock'n'roll Elmer Gantry, taking my mother for everything she had. Mr. De Vol adjusted the picture."

"Who's Elmer Gantry?"

"It's a book by—it doesn't matter. You were right about my graduation as well. I was looking through some photographs and I found this snapshot of me taken at Cornell. She *was* there, apparently, but she didn't—" Lanice thrust the photograph at him and turned away, her lower lip trembling. Doyle glanced at the picture, a montage of graduates, scrolls, mortarboards, and misty-eyed parents.

"Yeah," he sighed, "well, she said she went—" He stopped, confused. Something was wrong—very wrong—with the picture. Frowning, he examined it more closely. Lanice was arm-in-arm with several classmates in caps and gowns, and in the background, with his hand on her shoulder, was the Cuban—Esquivel.

"What was this guy doing there?"

"Who?"

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"The Cuban," Doyle snapped, "the guy in the black suit."

"Oh. You mean my brother?"

"Your brother?"

"Well, my half brother, actually. Jesse Cruz."

"Terry's—son?" he said numbly.

"By her first husband. My grandparents took custody of us both when Terry—well, you know. I don't see him often, but he flew in for my graduation."

"Flew in from where?"

"I'm not really sure. Washington, I suppose. He works for the treasury department. Why all the questions about Jess?"

"He just—looks like someone I used to know, I guess. Look, we'd better go."

"I interrupted you, didn't I? I'm sorry, I didn't mean—"

"It's not that," he said, shutting off the footlights to mask his confusion. "It's late, that's all."

"Yes, I suppose it is," she said, her voice disembodied in the sudden blackness. "Can you show me the way, please? I can't see."

He didn't answer for a moment. Couldn't answer. Her voice in the darkness seemed so exquisitely familar. He walked slowly to her, took her hand, and stood there on the darkened stage, feeling the rightness of it, knowing he'd found what he'd been looking for. What he'd been sent to find.

"Beaudine?" she said softly. "Can you see yet?"

"No," he lied, "not yet."

He wasn't sure how long they stood there—a long time, far longer than necessary, and they both knew it. Yet neither of them spoke or made any move to leave. And then there was a crash in the bar, and a mumbled curse.

"What was that?" Lanice asked.

"Quiet," he whispered.

There was more noise, and bumps and muttered exchanges, the sound of men blundering through the dark.

"Follow me." He led her silently to the wings. "Don't talk, listen. We've got trouble and we have to hide. Climb this ladder up into the light-rigging, quick, as quietly as you can. I'll be right behind you."

She started to protest, but the look on his face changed her mind. Instead, she moved silently up the ladder with surprising ease.

Twenty feet above the stage, she crawled along a plank catwalk

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to the lightbanks, a narrow platform thirty feet long that gave access to a row of spotlights and quartz followspots aimed at the stage below like a man'o'war's broadside.

"Yo, Beaudine!" Tucker's voice echoed through the hangar. "I know you're in here somewhere, we seen you come in. Come on out, boy, we gotta talk."

Doyle risked a glance below. Four men, maybe more, moving through the club like a wolfpack, silently searching. Too many for a conversation. He eased back from the edge of the platform, felt his elbow brush something, and the lightbank switched on. A slow procession of spotlight rings began to crawl across the stage. Tucker vaulted onstage and squinted up into the rigging.

"Beaudine? You up there? Don't be jerkin' us around now, I got two guys here with Mac 10's an' we can just hose you outta there. You'd best come on down. Be a lot easier on the buildin'."

"I don't think they know you're here," Doyle whispered to Lanice. "Stay put, no matter what. They can't see you while the lights are on." He rose and inched his way back along the catwalk to the ladder in the wings, then climbed slowly down. Four men ringed the ladder when he reached the stage—two Hispanics, a giant black, and Brodie Tucker. They were dressed in matching dark windbreakers and jeans, like shopworkers, union men, except that two of them held submachine guns.

"I, ah, I've been thinking," Doyle said. "I believe we can do a deal after all."

"Good," Tucker said. "We thought you might come around. Here's a phone number," he said, passing a slip of paper to Beaudine. "You just let us know what night you expect to be busy out here in the next couple of weeks and we'll take it from there. Don't lose that number now."

"And that's all there is to it?"

"Well, not quite." Tucker grinned. "See, my boss is a little ticked off about havin' to send me out here twice—he said to make damn sure you understand your situation this time. Hurt him some," he said casually to the black, "but don't bust nothin' important. The man's an artist."

"Doyle?" Terry's whisper seemed to come from far away.

"Doyle, answer me."

He opened his eye. He was onstage, kneeling, his hands clamped on a rung of the ladder. Lanice was beside him. He coughed, nearly

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folding in half with soul-deep agony. He clung to the ladder, waiting for the stage to steady. "Are they gone?" he managed.

"Yes. Oh, God, Doyle, you've got to get to a hospital—"

"No," he said softly, "not yet. Just let me be a few minutes. I think I'll be okay."

"I'm calling an ambulance."

"No," he said, seizing her wrist. "No ambulance, no police. Just help me get up."

"But you're—okay, here, lean on me." She ducked under his left arm, steadying him with her shoulder, holding him close. Too close. Their eyes met and held, and then slowly, cupping the nape of her neck with his fingertips, he lowered his lips to hers, covering her mouth, breathing in the scent of her, tasting his own blood. She folded herself to him, responding with a hungry intensity that surprised them both. And then a propane cannon flashed centerstage, firing a blazing plume of flame fifteen feet in the air.

"I, ah, guess I better shut all that down," he said, looking up into the rigging.

"I'll do it."

"No," he said, "I'd better. Things are—complicated up there."

The first silver hint of dawn was blending with Athens' glow on the horizon when Doyle rapped on the bungalow door. He waited a moment, rapped again, then heard someone moving around inside. Monk opened the door cautiously, barefoot, bleary-eyed, wearing torn cutoffs and a morning-after glower.

"Sweet Jesus," he said softly, "what the hell happened to you?"

"Business conference," Doyle said. "Didn't go too well."

"I guess it didn't," Monk said, slipping an arm across Doyle's shoulders, helping him inside. He eased him down on the tattered turquoise sofa, wincing as he examined his face, then padded into the kitchenette. "I gather your buddy Tucker came back," he called over his shoulder, pouring a dollop of Jack Daniels into a jelly glass.

"With friends," Doyle said, accepting the whiskey gratefully. "Apparently they've been watching the place, saw me go into the club. I tried to hide in the overhead light-rig. Quite a setup you got up there."

"You want me to call an ambulance?"

"A lot of things changed in the biz while I was holed up down in Louisiané," Doyle said, knocking back the bourbon in a single gulp. It seared a track down the back of his throat, exploded warmly in

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his belly, liquid smoke. "You've got some kind of a box up there that controls everything now, right?"

"A Leprecon LP-900," Monk nodded. "Why?"

"I bumped it, turned it on accidentally. Real bad timing on my part. Tucker spotted me. That, ah, box is programable, isn't it? To run everything in sequence?"

"That's right, but—"

"Not like the old days, is it?" Doyle said, cutting him off. "When you actually had to *be* there to run the show."

Monk stared at him, his open, freckled face expressionless. "You know, don't you." It wasn't a question.

"I found the catwalk up in the girders that leads back to the office. And the vent grid that lifts out of the suspended ceiling. But I don't understand it, Monk. You're not the peeping-tom type."

"It wasn't like that at all. I set up the catwalk when I installed the speakers in the ceiling, and I noticed the vent then. I couldn't figure it when Terry started spendin' time with that boatlifter. I mean the guy might as well've had 'pusher' tattooed on his face instead of whatever it was. I seen 'em go into the office together, so I bopped on back to check it out. And damnit, I was right."

"Right about what?"

"She was sellin' us out, Doyle. She was gonna let him use the field to move coke. All the years we busted our ass tryna make it, and then we get this one last chance, and she was gonna blow it. He had a briefcase fulla cash on her desk, and they were laughin' about it, for chrissake!"

"What happened?"

"I, ah, I lost it, man. I still had a ladder rigged from when I put in the speakers, so I jerked out the panel and swung down. Surprised hell out of 'em. The Cuban pulls a piece, I grabbed his arm, and the damn gun went off. And Terry was dead. Just like that. The Cuban pushed me aside and went to her and I copped the piece Terry kept in her desk and blew his ass away. It happened so fast, man, so fast!" He took a deep breath. "I could hear somebody askin' Sumo about the noise, and I panicked. I didn't want the cops to catch me in there, so I put the gun in Terry's hand, grabbed the briefcase, and climbed out. I swear to God, Doyle, I never meant it to happen, I didn't. But Terry shouldna done us that way. We all worked so hard—"

"Terry didn't sell us out, Monk," Doyle said softly.

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"Look, I didn't wanna believe it, either, but I heard 'em. They were—"

"They were setting up a sting, Monk. Had to be. The guy was an undercover cop. And he was her son."

"Her son? But— Oh, my God." The color drained from his face and he sat down, slowly. In the kitchenette the refrigerator clicked on, hummed for a while, then stopped.

"The cops'll never believe me now," Monk said at last, his voice barely a whisper. "I'll draw hard time sure as God made little green apples. They'll figure I did it for the money."

"Maybe. I don't know."

"But I *didn't!* Do you believe me?"

"I don't know that, either. Yeah. I guess I do. I have to. We've been through too much together, Monk. In a lot of ways, you're closer to me than my own kin. But Terry was close to us, too. And you should have known she wouldn't sell us out, man. You should've known." He staggered painfully to his feet. "Where's the money?"

"Here. Hid in a closet. What are you gonna do?"

"Finish what Terry started. Burn Tucker and his buddies and get the local law off our backs at the same time. But I'll need half the money, to show Sheriff Lee—he won't believe me otherwise. He'll figure I'm only tryin' to con him into lettin' us stay open."

"Why only half?"

"I figure the rest is yours, Monk. You earned it. Take it and split. Or turn yourself in. Either way, I want you gone. Today."

"Doyle, you know it was an accident—"

"And Terry's dead! And her kid is dead! And I won't be able to forget that, and neither will you. So you better get out while you can, Monk, or I swear I'll waste you myself!"

"Swear? On what? Your mama's grave?"

"You bastard," Doyle said, turning away. "God, what a mess."

"Yeah. It's a stone bitch, ain't it. Look, if I—if I decide to see the sheriff, will you come with me?"

"You sure you want to do that?"

"No," he said softly, "but I might as well. I got noplace else to go, Doyle. Noplace at all. Come with me?"

"I don't know, Monk, I—" He took a deep, ragged breath and let it out slowly. "Okay," he said at last, "why not? What are friends for?"

The walls of the makeshift dressing room resonated with the thun-

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der of applause as Go Van Go finished their second encore. "Whaddya think?" Punkin grinned tautly at Doyle. "Can we top those guys? Or should we just boogie out the back door?"

"We gotta go on," Hezekiah sighed, adjusting his headband in the mirror. "With all the county mounties stashed around the field, we'd likely get popped by mistake."

"Don't worry about the cops," Doyle said, "or Go Van Go, either. That's our stage out there, and our people. And tonight's our night. Gotta be. Everybody ready?"

"Doyle?" Sumo stuck his head in the door. "Somebody to see you."

"Later, Sume, we're on in a—" He broke off as Lanice squeezed past the giant bouncer.

"We'll, um, we'll go ahead'n get set, Doyle," Punkin said, glancing pointedly at Hezekiah and Teddy Z. "Three minutes, okay?"

"I'll be there," Doyle nodded as the others filed out. Lanice closed the door quietly after them. She was wearing a dove-grey business suit and looked professional, composed, controlled. And he felt his breathing go shallow at the sight of her.

"I won't keep you," she said quietly. "Herb and I are leaving. I just stopped by to say goodbye."

"I'm surprised you bothered. I haven't seen much of you since—the other night."

"I know. To tell you the truth, I've been avoiding you, Beaudine. Too much happened too fast. It frightened me. You frightened me."

"Look, I know things must look weird, but by tomorrow—"

"No. I don't want an explanation, Doyle. Nothing could be worth what's happened here. Nothing."

"I suppose not. And what happened between us? That doesn't mean anything, either?"

"Of course it does. The problem is, it seemed to mean almost too much. I'm suspicious of that. I know about you and my mother."

"That was a long time ago."

"Perhaps, but I'm not sure how I feel about it. It's too—gothic for me, Doyle. I don't think I can handle it."

"Gothic. Well, I guess that's a step up from Elmer Gantry or whoever. And maybe you're right. Maybe it is too gothic. But if you leave tonight, you'll never know for sure. And neither will I." A slow rhythmic clapping began to ripple across the auditorium, faint at first, but growing.

"I think you're being paged," she said.

"Damnit, Lanice, this isn't fair. Stay one more day, please. If I

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can't change your mind, I'll drive you to the airport myself and wish you luck."

"I don't think that's a good idea, Doyle. I'm sorry."

"Don't be sorry. It's all right. I understand. I really do. So—kiss me goodbye?"

"No," she said, meeting his gaze, smiling faintly, "not a chance."

"Look, I've gotta go," he said. "Be here when I get back. Please." He tried to brush her face with his fingertips as he left, but she turned away.

Outside, the clapping was deafening, thundering like a battalion on the march. He trotted up the stairway to the darkened stage, picked up his bass guitar, and strapped it on, glancing out over the audience as he checked his tuning. A sea of faces, wall to wall, wired up by Go Van Go's show, energy hovering in the air like heat-lightning. And he wished to God Terry could have seen this. And Monk.

He turned his back to the crowd and faced the Angels—Punkin, Hezekiah, Teddy Z. For the next hour they'd be closer than blood, cogs in a rock'n'roll machine. Doyle fingerpopped a quick four and they hammered an open E in unison, shaking the stage, letting it build into an armageddon howl of feedback that rattled the walls of Heaven. He spun to face the audience, their faces barely visible now, erased by the blaze of the floodlights, glimpsed Lanice moving through the crowd near the stage, couldn't tell if she was leaving or staying, and didn't have time to worry about it. Maybe she was right—nothing could be worth what happened. But this was close. Damn close. And if she left now, by God, she was gonna miss one helluva show.

"Hey!" he shouted. *"Y'all ready to party?"*

The roared response rolled over the stage like an avalanche of noise, applause, and rebel yells, so loud he could feel it, a ten-thousand-fingertip caress.

"Well, you're at the right place! And anytime you're in Dixie, Heaven ain't far away!"

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

JAMES POWELL

On the other side of the orchard from the Goodlings, in a house trailer set up on a cinder-block foundation, lived Carl Baddish, his wife Malva, and their teenaged son Kyle. Baddish did a lot of handyman work in Deer Xing, but he dreamed of turning junk into inventions that would make his fortune.

A non-series story from our highly esteemed James Powell—we've come to think of him as the Russell Baker of short mystery fiction: bright, ever original, seamless, right on the mark. "Still Life with Orioles" is as full of wit as any James Powell story you're likely to name, and deeply poignant as well . . .

STILL LIFE WITH ORIOLES

by JAMES POWELL

You've passed the sign and the turnoff a hundred times out there on the old highway. It's halfway between Merge and Falling Rock. Deer Xing, the town's called.

Maybe you've wondered how a place around here got to be named after an Oriental. Folks tell me he arrived in town one afternoon about twenty-five years ago—a small man, barely able to peer over the steering wheel of his modest car. The town was called Droverton then. He parked in front of the Drover's Bank, his quick, quiet step took him inside, and he was closeted with Chip Cullet for several hours. It was no secret that Cullet, the husband of old Charlie Drover's great granddaughter, wasn't interested in making a go of the bank and wanted to move back to Merge, where his family's business was. There had even been talk that the bank might close.

Deer Xing stayed at the Central Hotel for the rest of the week, taking his meals in the dining room—whose food I heartily rec-

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ommend. He spent his days going over the bank ledgers. Evenings, you might come across him walking the town street by street. He must have liked what he saw, for pretty soon the word was out that the bank had found a new owner.

Everyone expected Deer Xing to live in the old Drover mansion, but instead he chose a cheery little place on the outskirts of town, which, along with an extensive apple orchard adjoining, had come to the bank through foreclosure. His arrival marked a kind of turnaround in the fortunes of the town. Most of those Deer Xing loaned money to prospered, and so, of course, did he. Over the next few years, he became active in the local service clubs and the Boy Scouts. Somewhere along the line he joined the Unitarian choir because it needed a baritone and he ended up marrying the church organist, one of those plain little women people always say will make some sensible person a fine wife one day. Well, people were right. They became a devoted couple and raised four fine smiling children.

Deer Xing was a kind of leaven for the town—congenial and modest, but at the same time a down-to-earth businessman happy to show would-be bank borrowers how better to structure their endeavor. He served three terms on the town council, and though he'd have been a shoo-in he steadfastly refused to run for mayor. The year he was Droverton Day chairperson, he turned the tired street fair into an event drawing people from miles around. All it took was renting a couple of circus calliopes to liven things up. From then on, they called it Calliope Day and it grew into a dueling pipe-organ and snare-drum kind of thing, with owners trundling their contraptions in from all over the landscape to battle for prizes offered by the Drover's Bank. And when some town booster suggested they put Droverton on the map by building a Circus Calliope Hall of Fame, it was Deer Xing who offered the seed money to get the project started and promised more where that came from.

Right after Deer Xing made this generous offer, he left on one of his regular business trips to Beltway, which is just about as close as we get to a big city out here. As she usually did when it was summer and school was out, his wife took the children to visit her mother, who lived in the mountains just this side of Donot Pass. That same night, at a special town meeting everybody had been secretly planning for some time, the mayor said, "Neighbors, why should we put Droverton on the map? What's the Drover family done for us lately?" Then he formally proposed that the name of the town

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be changed to Deer Xing in honor of their most beloved citizen. The motion was seconded and carried unanimously.

The next few days were a flurry of activity. The street signs and the name on the town hall had to be changed and the side of the police car repainted. I wasn't there when Deer Xing drove back into town and saw all the happy faces and the bunting and read the banner strung across Main Street that said WELCOME TO DEER XING, DEER XING, but considering what I know now I wouldn't wonder that he had trouble mustering a tired smile for everyone. That night the lights burned late at the bank.

The wire services picked up on the story about the town that changed its name to honor an Oriental model citizen, and because it was a slow news day many of the morning papers featured it prominently. A WMRG-TV crew arrived at Deer Xing's door early the next morning to find the house empty. The banker and his family had fled during the night. The bank examiners discovered a shortage of close to fifty thousand dollars, just about all the cash on hand at closing time, but considerably less than all the money Deer Xing had invested in the bank. So why run off the way he did? You tell me.

In all the confusion, few gave a mind to the two soberly dressed Oriental gentlemen who arrived in town that same afternoon asking polite questions, like did anybody see which way Deer Xing headed when he left town. Spud Horst, who ran the garage in town, swore one had a dragon tattoo wrapped around his wrist. As it happened, Deer Xing did, too. Whenever the town kids asked to see it, he'd smile and pull up his sleeve to reveal a long thin dragon that undulated down the forearm, wound around the wrist, and ended up with its head on the ball of his thumb. He told adults the tattoo was the result of a youthful indiscretion. So pretty soon after Deer Xing skipped, a story made the rounds that he had been the treasurer of some murderous tong, absconded with the fan-tan receipts, and come to Droverton seeking an oblivion which the town would inadvertently deny him.

I didn't start coming to Calliope Day until several years after Deer Xing's disappearance. When I retired, I started this little business. Give me a snapshot of your home and I'll build you a birdhouse for your back yard or a mailbox for out front that looks just like it. I work the small street fairs and flea markets, showing a few samples

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of what I do and taking orders. That's how I met Harvey Goodling's wife Nora, who had the stand next to mine one Calliope Day.

The Goodlings had rented Deer Xing's old house on the edge of town. Nora sold herb plants, which she grew herself, and oriole nests. The long-neglected orchard next door had become a terrible landscape of bramble, vines, and twisted trees by that time, wilder than wild, the way tame things do when you let them go. But several pair of orioles nested there. When she was a girl, her mother hung out bright strands of yarn in the spring for the birds to build their nests with. And so did Nora.

In early spring, she'd hear the first tentative calls and see flashes of color in the treetops. Soon the birds were making cautious sorties down to the wool. The particular creatures would sometimes build two or three nests before they were satisfied with their work, and each autumn when the leaves fell Nora and Harvey went through a gap in the chain-link fence and got the nests with a ladder. When she started bringing a few of the prettiest along with her when she set up her booth on Calliope Day, they were great conversation pieces. Somebody suggested putting them in with a swag of dried flowers to hang on your front door. Somebody else said Christmas-tree decorations. A cozy for a toy tea-set, said another. But when you come right down to it, I don't think people liked the idea of old birds' nests no matter how many bright strands of wool they had woven into them. Nobody ever bought one. Come to think of it, I never heard her mention a price. Maybe she didn't mean to sell them.

After Nora Goodling's headaches started, Harvey would handle the stand for her whenever he had the time. Harvey taught English at Falling Rock State College. If I was busy with a customer and he wasn't, he'd always have a book to stick his nose into. But if I wanted to talk, he'd close the book on his thumb quick enough. He had given up on his doctoral thesis somewhere along the line. I guess he'd never published anything. But I could tell he loved teaching. Mention Shakespeare and the poets and he'd talk your ear off. From what I heard, his students who liked such things liked Goodling and those who didn't said he made it all sound like they should. His courses at Falling Rock were usually freshman composition and remedial this and remedial that, with something fancier thrown in now and then when a colleague was off on sabbatical.

Goodling's life centered on his teaching, his wife, his bookish daughter Portia, and long walks along the river. He told me about

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this peeled log along the bank where he'd sometimes sit and read while he waited for the muskrat who had a burrow somewhere nearby to come swimming past, pleating the water with its nose, making a gentle grunting sound as it went, or he'd watch the kingfisher hover head high above the river. I liked Harvey. His point of view was a thoughtful one. He was fairly content at the way things had turned out for him. "I guess I'm a still life in a moving-picture world," he used to say. "But that's all right."

On the other side of the orchard, in a house trailer set up on a cinder-block foundation, lived Carl Baddish, his wife Malva, and their teenaged son Kyle. Baddish did a lot of the handyman work in Deer Xing, but he dreamed of turning junk into inventions that would make his fortune. The yard in front of his trailer was littered with old pieces of rusting machinery, cogs, and wheels he'd dragged home from the town dump. He spent his free time, rain or shine, sitting in an old overstuffed easy chair in a crude tepee made of tarpaulin and clothesline poles, looking out over this yard full of iron with his chin in his hand. Sometimes he'd go pick up a cog wheel here and walk over to a drive shaft there. For a few thoughtful moments he'd try to fit the two together like this and like that. Then he'd mutter, drop them both where he stood, and return to tepee and chair, to cheek and palm.

Kyle spent most of his time stripped to the waist, working on his car in the driveway. Malva had claimed the steep back steps outside the kitchen door as her own, and sat there to peel potatoes or crochet the pot holders she sold on Calliope Day or talk to Duke, their Lab who was chained to a dog box.

What bad feeling existed between the Goodlings and the Baddishes came mostly from Carl's notions about fuzzy-minded, stuckup college types. Harvey's few attempts at neighborly small talk hadn't changed Carl's thinking one bit. Actually, Malva Baddish admired Nora. One year she decided to do oriole nests for Calliope Day, too, except with flashier colors. But Carl said, why waste good wool? Recycling's the ticket. Leave this one to me, he said.

Next spring, out on their sagging clothesline, he hung his accumulation of used dental floss, the spaghetti noodles from two nights before, a winter of bloody string from butcher parcels, worn and mended shoelaces, tape from the loudest of the loud rock-and-roll cassettes that Kyle played until they gave up the ghost, and things of like nature. Come fall, Carl collected his nests, which were easy enough to tell from the Goodlings'. He scratched his head while he

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looked at them like this and like that. Finally he decided to lacquer the nests, mount them on pieces of wood, and sell them as novelty wall plaques.

As it happened, one of the Calliope Day judges that year was Stanford Breeze, who taught contemporary-art history at Falling Rock. As he told the Deer Xing *Bugle,* "If architecture is frozen music, then surely transportation is frozen calliope music." (That kind of sounds like gridlock to me, but what do I know?) During his quick tour of the booths with his entourage, I heard Breeze express the hope that the abundance of pine cutouts of pigs, geese, and ducks decorated with calico ribbons represented the last dying gasp of the country-yuppie style. He paused long enough over the Goodling oriole nests to pronounce them "unrepentantly genteel." But he put on the brakes so fast he almost got whiplash as he passed the Baddish booth.

He called Carl's wall plaques the highest form of "found art," found art of the aided-and-abetted sort. He bought every last nest on the spot and promised to fix Carl up with a gallery to handle anything else he came up with. Then he threw his arm over Carl's shoulder and walked off with him, talking about how nature puts all artists to shame, except for those few whose talented eyes can discover and improve on the designs she has hidden all around us. Baddish must have bought it, for when I drove out of town I saw him out at the dump tossing a crushed thirty-gallon drum into the back of his pickup. (I later heard he applied some mother-of-pearl trim, entitled the thing "Carl's Concertina," and sold it for a bundle.)

After that, Baddish sold a lot of things—like the three river stones, See-No-Evil, Hear-No-Evil, and Speak-No-Evil, that are now on display in some big art museum out East. When spring came around again, he was paying farmers for the right to hang up his trash in their orchards and collect the oriole nests each fall. He even came upon Goodling's favorite tree trunk on one of his forays along the river and discerned in the tortured shape of the wood a naked man and woman twined together in passionate embrace. Didn't Baddish go and cart the damn thing off, polish and varnish it, and sell it to Falling Rock State College? And didn't they exhibit the damn thing right there in the quadrangle so that Harvey never had to go a day without blushing to remember what he'd sat on for years.

So, with Harvey looking on and shaking his head, half in wonder and half in disbelief, Baddish prospered and took to sporting a beret

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and an artistic swagger. He moved into town to live in the old Drover mansion. Not long after, he and some of the art faculty at the college launched the Baddish Correspondence School of Found Art. The venture was an immediate success and the next thing Harvey knew Baddish had bought the orchard, repaired the chain-link fence, and put No Trespassing signs all around.

About this orchard, did I mention how people started remembering things after Deer Xing disappeared? Like Coach Tawney recalling how he'd been in Beltway one afternoon getting a trophy engraved and saw the banker come out of a shop that bought and sold jade? Which reminded someone else how there'd always been a lantern moving in the orchard the night before each of Deer Xing's trips to the city. That started the story of a buried trove of priceless jade art treasures from mainland China that Deer Xing had been selling off piece by piece as the bank needed the money. This sure brought the diggers out for a few nights, in the hope Xing had had to leave the jade behind when he fled with the Red Chinese hot on his trail. But it was a big orchard and nobody ever found anything. I guess for Baddish, who was becoming a very busy man, buying the orchard was a way to make sure nobody stumbled on the jade before he got around to finding it himself.

The loss of the orchard would have been a bigger blow to Nora and Harvey Goodling if that spring a pair of orioles hadn't chosen to nest in the apple tree in their yard. The next time he saw me, Harvey insisted I come by for a look, swearing he was starting to see a pattern in the nests they wove. I stood with him and Nora in the yard, looking through binoculars at that windy tree, but I can't say I saw any pattern.

The year Baddish found the stain in the shape of North America on an old plaster wall and dreamed his dream of creating his now-celebrated *Found Art Map of the World*, Portia Goodling dropped out of college to run off and marry Kyle Baddish. Baddish, who had set his sights on the boy becoming an architect, never spoke to his son again. The couple settled down in Merge, where Kyle got a job with Culletco. Whenever Nora's health was up to it, Harvey took her to visit their daughter and son-in-law in their tiny apartment. He said he couldn't understand what Portia saw in young Baddish but it was clear to him that they were in love. Later Harvey told me that even if he wished Portia had made something more of herself, he'd be the first to admit he hadn't set her much of an example.

When Baddish found the kidney stone shaped like the Rock of

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Gibraltar, a well known insurance company paid him a bundle to complete his Found Art Map of the World for the lobby of their international headquarters. That same year, Nora Goodling had her first fainting spell. The doctors diagnosed a small brain tumor. Her recovery from surgery was slower than expected. Portia was busy with her first child and expecting her second, but she gave as much help as she could.

All Harvey had time for now was preparing his classes, marking papers, and taking care of his wife. The orioles in the apple tree had to take the place of his walks along the river. He was very faithful about putting out the wool as Nora would have done. In fact, the next spring when I saw him outside the supermarket and remarked that for a still life he was moving pretty fast, he insisted that the new nests were definitely "plaidish." Inviting me to drop by sometime, he disappeared across the parking lot in a racket of shopping-cart wheels.

By the time Baddish got the last bit of geography for his map, a constellation of moles from the backside of an anonymous donor that was a perfect representation of the Scilly Isles, a blood clot sent Goodling's wife back to the hospital. When she came out again, Harvey had to hire a woman to help him care for her.

Things might have continued like this if the new president at Falling Rock State College hadn't decided to upgrade the place academically and get rid of the non-tenured faculty. Harvey's contract with the college wasn't renewed, and at the end of summer school he found himself out of a job. That winter he found part-time work teaching on the other side of Merge, although with what they paid I don't see how he kept going. Meanwhile, Nora's condition slowly worsened. Clearly she would soon need nursing-home care.

By spring there was a lot of talk about lantern sightings in the orchard again. It occurred to me that it might just be Harvey out on some desperate search for jade, so one night I came by, intending to lead the conversation in that direction. But all Harvey wanted to talk about were the new oriole nests. It wasn't just plaid this year, he insisted, it was definitely argyle. But while he went on about it, his eyes were too bright and he couldn't sit in one place for longer than a moment or two. If he wasn't jumping up to see how Nora was, he was straightening a picture or going over to the window facing on the orchard. Yes, he said when I finally insisted—yes, he'd seen

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the lantern. Several times, and always late at night. Somebody was sneaking around over there all right.

He said okay when I asked if we could turn off the lights and keep an eye out ourselves. (At least if we saw a lantern, I'd know it hadn't been Harvey.) So we sat in the dark with only the light from the kitchen door and the lamp in the stairwell. But he couldn't stay off the subject of the oriole nests long. He seemed to be putting a great deal of store in them.

"All right," I said at last, "I'll take your word for it. So they're argyle. So what?"

Well, he hummed and hawed for a bit, trying to put his thoughts into words. Then he said, "It's like a rainbow."

"You mean some kind of a covenant?" I asked.

He wouldn't go that far. "I mean like hope," he said.

"Well," I said, regretting the words as soon as they were out of my mouth, "it all sounds a lot like Breeze and Baddish's found art to me."

That shut him up for a real long time. Then he nodded and got up. He went into the kitchen and came back carrying a gin bottle and two glasses.

Now Harvey wasn't much of a drinking man. Nor am I when it comes down to straight gin. But I could see he needed to talk. And I'll give him this, he spoke without the self-pity that usually comes with the territory when you uncork a bottle. He said he held himself responsible for the way things had turned out—not his wife's condition, of course, but losing his job and now not being able to provide for her as he should. He should have finished his thesis, published in his field, and been more ruthless about class work, even if it meant spending less time with his wife and Portia. "And do you know what else I did?" he concluded in a voice breathless with amazement. "I made myself a brother to the muskrat and a companion to the kingfisher!" We looked at each other like he'd almost quoted Scripture.

Nodding decisively as if to reaffirm everything he'd said, Harvey fell silent and remained that way for a long time. Bad as the light was, I could tell from his face that he found it hard to accept that all those happy times he remembered had been wrong. Finally, as if out of nowhere, he said, "All that's left is the insurance policy. I'm worth more dead than alive." Just then a beam of light swept across the living room and we jumped to the window.

With all the lantern business, Baddish had started driving out

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from town regularly to work a spotlight through the trees. That night he must have thought he saw something. As we watched, he killed the lights, unlocked the gate, and drifted the truck down into the orchard. After a bit, we heard a shout and a shot. Later Baddish claimed he'd seen an Oriental in a shiny black suit running away, and fired when the man refused to stop. He swore the bullet hit the blade of the man's shovel. If you ask me, he hit one of his own No Trespassing signs. Anyway, some said Deer Xing had come back to claim his jade. Others said it was a Red Chinese agent whose people had tortured Deer Xing into revealing where he'd buried the trove.

The next time I saw Harvey was in the checkout line at the Eat/Gas convenience store on the edge of town. I was on my way back from dinner at the Central Hotel. His spirits were pretty low. The doctors had told him the time had come for Nora to go into a nursing home. While he was describing the grim results of his day making the rounds of the local social agencies to see what financial help he could get, I saw Baddish drive by, heading out to the orchard. So did the town cop standing in line ahead of us—he remarked to the girl at the register that Baddish had better not try anything like a mantrap or he'd find himself in real trouble. I hadn't thought Harvey heard, but a few minutes later he turned to watch the cop leave the store and, half to me and half to himself, said thoughtfully, "With Carl's luck, he'd probably come out of it smelling like a rose."

"Come out of what?" I asked. But Harvey didn't answer. He just gave a small smile.

Three days later, when I heard Harvey had been killed, my first thought was that he'd committed suicide, maybe not knowing some insurance companies don't pay off on something like that. But it couldn't have been suicide. They found his body inside the orchard, on a path about fifteen feet away from a hole snipped in the fence. He'd been shot through the heart. The pistol that killed him lay a few feet away. There were no fingerprints on it, which there would have to have been if Harvey had done it to himself, since he wasn't wearing gloves.

Some envious types wanted to pin it on Baddish, even though he'd been out of town getting inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Others said Harvey might've surprised Deer Xing digging up his jade and paid for it with his life. Or was he, as others suggested, just another victim in a struggle between the East and

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the West over a jade scepter that made any man who possessed it the rightful Emperor of China?

Harvey Goodling's murder remained a mystery, preying on my mind long after the powers-that-be declared it death by party or parties unknown. The insurance company paid off. But Nora Goodling passed away in a matter of weeks and the bulk of the money went to Portia, who used it to put Kyle through architectural school.

There was a bad windstorm late that autumn. A day or so later, I happened to be driving by when I noticed something different about the Goodling place. As it still stood unrented, I turned in at the driveway to investigate. The apple tree in the back yard had heaved over during the storm and come down hard on the tool shed. I went over and stood at the fence for a bit, looking at the place where Harvey's body had been found, wondering what had really happened to him.

As I started back to the car, I saw something on the ground that made Harvey's last few minutes as plain as day. I could see him wiping the fingerprints from the pawn-shop revolver and tying it into a heart-high crotch of a tree with a length of fishing line. Then he threads the line through the trigger-guard and leads it down the tree until it's about five inches off the ground. Wrapping the line once around the tree, he leads it across the path and ties it off at the base of a tree on the other side. He probably tries a couple of dry runs with his foot to make the trigger click, imagining the trajectory of the bullet with his eye. Then he loads the chamber.

So Harvey Goodling found his way to make sure Nora got the money from the insurance policy and the care she needed. Like I said, I liked Harvey. He was under a great deal of pressure. Did he mean to implicate Baddish? Or did he really believe that with Baddish's luck, the man would come out of it smelling like a rose? I don't know. Maybe he'd have handled things better without Baddish's successes to measure his misfortunes against.

An oriole nest lay on the ground beside the fallen apple tree. The argyle design was almost perfect, the diamonds of yellow and blue wool and brown grass all neat and regular. Yet, like an engraver who decides at the last minute that the plate is not up to standard and crosshatches the whole thing with his stylus, the orioles had woven a long length of fishing line back and forth randomly through their design.

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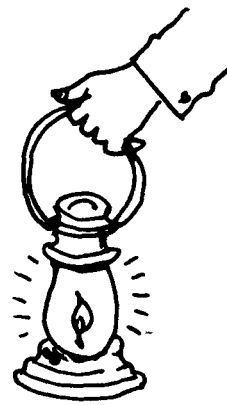
Well, that's the end of the story. You've been a real good listener. Time I was heading back home to Rumble Strips.

What's that? Yes, you're right. I've always thought that's a damn funny name for a town, too. When Sadie Rumble moved from the big city in the early forties to open her roadhouse, you can bet she thought she'd left exotic dancing behind forever. But when the Army base closed down and business started falling off real bad, well, she needed something to draw in the customers.



DETECTIVERSE

COMEBACK FAVORITE

by VICTORIA HAWKINS

My favorite detective
Puffs on a foul cigar,
He wears a wrinkled raincoat
And drives a funky car.
He aggravates his suspects
With his hesitant goodbyes—
My favorite is Columbo,
Unkempt but, oh, so wise.

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Every few years, some public figure would disappear and the police would dutifully inspect the weeds and refuse piles by the road outside Mexico City, turning up tens and dozens of inexpertly buried corpses. Between times, the task of collection was left to the flies, to blackbirds, rats, and patrols of lean yellow dogs . . .

THE WHITE CARD

by RICHARD PATRICK GIBBONS

Simeon Perales kept shop during the evenings at a small store called the Porvenir in a sprawling new factory settlement overlooking Mexico City. He wore a suit and tie on his ride to work and had an attache case strapped to the carrier rack behind his bicycle seat. It contained his supper, a copy of *Impacto* magazine, an Ellery Queen novel, and the television-repair manual for a night course he had started six years before.

Nearly all Simeon's possessions—suit and attache case, magazine and novel—were second-hand items. He felt they lost nothing from being warmed over. The Porvenir's customers might tire of stories drawn from his reading, but Simeon's grandchildren had not. The wear-polished suit lent a needed formality to his presence at the store, which became a beer-bar at quitting time. Without enough formality, the crowd could forget its manners. Shootings and knifings were not uncommon at the Porvenir.

With lives depending on his dignity, a shopkeeper couldn't afford to be seen huffing and straining uphill. That ruled out shifting his bicycle to a lower gear on the long road to work from his home at Santa Fe Chautempan. The grade was steep and the afternoon sun was hot for a winter day. Beyond even that, his trip was safer to finish quickly. The occasional trucks, roaring uphill from the misty depths of the great city at his back, whirred within a few centimeters of his left elbow, each of them nearly jerking the handlebars from his grasp.

Yet traffic was not the only inconvenience of the road. There were always places along the route where rotting matter assailed the

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nose—restaurant garbage, killed dogs or cats, and, at times, far worse. Mexico City had many violent people and little effective law enforcement. Isolated stretches of road became a graveyard for every city bandit, pimp, extortionist, or common murderer among eighteen million people.

Every few years, some public figure would disappear and the police would dutifully inspect the weeds and refuse piles, turning up tens and dozens of inexpertly buried corpses. Between times, the task of collection was left to the flies, to blackbirds, rats, and patrols of lean yellow dogs.

Simeon was not expecting to witness a macabre delivery on his way to work. Corpses were generally dumped at night and assumed to be dead prior to their arrival and so he scarcely noticed when the brown Caribe Volkswagen swerved onto the road's shoulder and stopped some hundred meters ahead of him—and he watched without interest as a slim man in baggy overalls climbed from the square little car's passenger side.

Simeon couldn't have said what made him reach for the gear shift. It might have been the slim man's reluctant slowness to shut the car door, or the way his body recoiled from the road's edge, as if afraid to fall off. Perhaps, too, Simeon's caution was simply shock from the size and quickness of the huge North American. One moment the driver was still inside the car, the next he was looming twice as tall as its roof, his attention riveted on the slim figure that moved so shyly to the edge of the embankment.

At that distance, Simeon never saw a pistol. He didn't, in fact, get another clear view of either living man. After shifting gears, he bent his neck, keeping his eyes on the jagged edge of the pavement as he laboriously pedaled another twenty meters. When a truck passed him, straining uphill with a load of cement, a quick glance told him both men had left the roadway.

Simeon decided he was already too near the brown Caribe. The rot-scented air along the roadway had become heavy with menace.

There had been other witnesses. A woman with a young girl had barely passed the brown car—she had glanced back, then hurried on and was far up the road, dragging the child. A pair of young factory workers coming down the hill just moments earlier had totally disappeared.

Rather than flee downhill, Simeon climbed from the bicycle and squatted, pretending to repair it. (He was still nearly the length of a soccer field from the little car.) He had no real evidence that

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murder was being done—as a *de facto* bartender, he had seen killings at a much closer range.

But competitive passion was probably chief among his motives for standing his ground. He had stumbled into an event that might interest even the most worldly and well traveled of his Porvenir boasters.

Simeon presumed that a victim wearing overalls rather than ordinary street clothes indicated quite a professional killing. So, too, did a heavyweight North American triggerman. He felt reasonably certain that gringos didn't share the ordinary passions and crimes of Mexicans—everything he read indicated that they engaged only in large enterprises and killed for grand matters of state or for staggering sums of money.

Whatever his reasoning, Simeon was still tinkering with his bicycle when a loud explosion sent clouds of blackbirds wheeling into the air.

That pistol crash changed everything. Vastly louder than expected, it put an end to Simeon's curiosity and his detachment. He gripped the bicycle as if both he and it might be blown from the roadway—and he shuddered as a second shot echoed against the hillside. Two more hollow reports followed the first two. Simeon would have fled at that point but found he couldn't move. Yet, despite his panic, the shopkeeper continued to make assessments, wondering if the four shots didn't mean a missed aim. Could the slim man have tried to run and perhaps escaped? Often that happened at the Porvenir.

Whatever the case, the gunman was already climbing back onto the roadway as the flock of blackbirds, and Simeon as well, were still deciding on a direction of escape. Even viewed from the corner of an eye, the Norteamericano was plainly a giant. He seemed to fold himself into the little car.

Simeon's own moment drew near. He bent to his pretended repairs, knowing he should have escaped with the others, heart hammering his ribs like some imprisoned maniac. Life might depend on a foreigner's professional judgment.

Would the killer notice that he wasn't close enough to read the little car's license plates? Would he know that poor people don't readily go to the police in Mexico and must be dragged into a court to testify against strangers?

The brown car squirted a sudden cloud of dust into the weeds and careened, turning across the roadway. It hurtled toward Simeon,

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gathering speed. Simeon prepared to leap from the highway if the thing swerved to hit him, but it shot past. As he closed his eyes and prayed his thanks to God, the sound of the Caribe faded into the drone of city traffic from below.

When the tiny brown shape arrived almost to Chautempan, Simeon climbed onto his bicycle and resumed the trip to work, his legs straining mightily in low gear.

Simeon hadn't planned on stopping, but the story for which he had risked his life was not complete. Recalling the number of shots fired, he knew the slim man could have gotten away. Surely others would demand to know. Driven by that doubt, he climbed from the bicycle, took a deep breath, and bolted toward the edge of a small ravine that paralleled the roadway.

There had been no escape. Two empty rubber shower shoes lay sprawled at the gully's edge. Below them, an uncommonly still pair of bare feet stretched from the legs of shiny new overalls. A further glance showed a hideous destruction of the man's skull and, peculiarly, of both hands.

Despite his experience in such matters, Simeon was shocked, both at the excess of gore and the completeness of annihilation. He had witnessed a very professional form of death. The victim had been dressed for his disappearance in overalls and rubber sandals. The gaping pistol wounds had cancelled all chance of identification. This was more than death—it was obliteration.

As Simeon stood, transfixed by horror at the sudden dispatch of a human life and the sickening perfection of the gunman's methods, he saw the white card. It was standing on edge, lodged against a bush.

The memento might have impressed people at the Porvenir, but Simeon had lost all interest in storytelling. He knew the card shouldn't have been there; he knew he shouldn't have seen it. Terrified beyond reason by the cold methodology of this new sort of murder, he ran back and peered stealthily down the road to be certain the killer had not returned. Only then, and after a moment of intense terror for himself, did he crouch to snatch up the card.

It was certainly a trick played on the giant. His victim had held onto that little card when his clothing was taken from him. Perhaps it had been concealed between his slim foot and the shower shoe.

The card's inscription bore out Simeon's faith that Americans were always engaged in grand intrigue. It had the seal of the United

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States with a tiny eagle perched on a shield and its head in a cloud. There was a North American name:

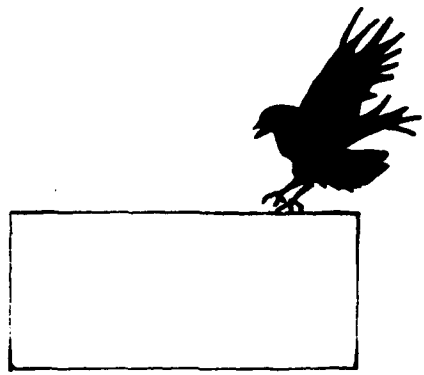
ALEXANDER J. HECKER

A time—1 P.M.—was scribbled on its back.

Simeon's face broke into a smile. With all the care with which the murderer had worked, his victim had managed to leave a clue behind. Here certainly was a triumph of mind over brute force.

But his smile was sad rather than triumphant. As the victim undoubtedly would have known, leaving the card was only a clever gesture, appropriate for mystery books. Perhaps such a clue would have practical value in the United States or England or in some other place where detectives and citizens had some common ground of public interest. On the road from Santa Fe Chautempan, it was simply another bit of windblown trash, its power barely strong enough to prevent him from keeping it as a souvenir.

But it did have such force. Simeon Perales was shivering, and nausea churned his stomach. When he flipped the white card among the weeds, he kept his arm low to the ground in case some fellow townsman, viewing from the road, might spot the movement. He felt safer that no one knew the thing existed.



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a *NEW* short story by

ELIZABETH BYRD

Dolly worked at the Palm Palace Hotel as a manicurist, and was both a necessity and a luxury Ed Pollard couldn't afford to lose. If she read the newspaper announcement that his wife was expecting a baby, he would have to formulate some very convincing story . . .

THE MESSAGE

by ELIZABETH BYRD

At breakfast, Claire Pollard said, "Hangover, dear?"

Ed swallowed two aspirin with his orange juice. "But worth it. What guy wouldn't celebrate? Only you're absolutely certain?"

She smiled. "Dr. Irving doesn't lie. And I was sure of it myself."

The maid came in, brought Danish pastries, and poured more coffee. When she had left, Ed said, "You'd better go easy on the sweets."

Claire was already overweight, he thought, a danger to the baby if she didn't start dieting. "We want a healthy son, don't we?"

"Of course." She withdrew her hand from the pastry plate. "Must it be a son?"

He shrugged. It had to be. No macho male wanted a daughter. A spare room, when arranged as a nursery, wouldn't hold dolls and sissy stuff but drums and toy soldiers. In time, war games, guns. Edward, Jr., would hunt and fish, scuba dive and fly his own plane. Claire could afford anything.

He remembered when he was eighteen his mother saying, "Marry for money, honey. With your looks, you don't have to settle for less." So, three years ago he had wisely chosen Claire—plump, placid, and richer than a ton of those pastries. He had called to sell her insurance, and in the process assured his own financial security.

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"I'm glad it's a Saturday," he said, sipping coffee. "No office."

"Could we picnic on the beach?" she asked.

"Sorry, I've got golf at eleven—Judge Hartman. And lunch with some prospects later. But I'll be home for dinner."

Wistfully, she said, "Could we dine out? I'd like to dress up."

"I'll reserve at the club when I get there," he told her. If only she were as slim, as stunning as Dolly. It was ironic that he could be seen with this lump of a wife, but he couldn't take Dolly anywhere. Miami was as gossipy as a hick village.

"Oh, Ed, the club's stuffy. Let's go to La Fiesta and dance." She giggled. "I'm supposed to exercise."

"Not La Fiesta," he said. "It's being invaded by gays."

"Silly, you don't have to dance with them."

"But I'd have to look at them."

She lit a cigarette. "Why can't you ignore them?"

"Would you ignore a bunch of lesbians?"

"Why not? They're no threat to me."

He rattled down his coffee cup. "Do you think *I'm* afraid of *queers?*"

"No, but—"

"But what?"

"The way you carry on about them." She giggled again.

"By God, Claire, if you're insinuating—"

"I'm only teasing, Edward."

"You'd better be. And you'd better stop smoking, too. The boy could be born deformed or puny."

Claire sighed and stubbed out the cigarette. Ed reached for the paper, giving her the second section, and they read for a while in silence. Then she said, "Why, it's in already. 'Mr. and Mrs. Edward H. Pollard of Palm Drive are expecting their first child in December.' Mother must have phoned it in."

Damn her mother. Now Dolly would raise hell.

"What's the matter, dear? Is your headache worse?"

"Yes," he said. "It's that champagne your parents brought last night. You can't trust it like Scotch." He rose from the table. "I don't feel like golf, but I'd better be on my way."

Claire blew him a kiss.

All day, he worried about Dolly. She worked at the Palm Palace Hotel as a manicurist, and since Saturdays were especially busy she might not have had time to look at the paper. But he had to see her

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and formulate some very convincing story. She was both a necessity and a luxury he couldn't afford to lose.

At four o'clock, free of business, he drove to Cartier's. He had taught Dolly that diamonds were vulgar, but she loved jade. With his Master Card, he bought exquisite teardrop earrings, pocketed the little gift-wrapped box, and called Claire from a phone booth.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but I can't take you out for that dinner tonight. These prospects I saw at lunch are practically in my pocket and they want to do the town."

She sighed. "Nightclubs."

"Yeah, I guess so. It's their idea, not mine."

"Just watch out for AIDS," she said.

"Now what the hell do you mean by that? They're not bloody gays!"

"Oh, you and your gays! Call girls are just as likely to have—"

"*My* gays!" He banged down the phone in a fury. What he needed was a double Scotch in a quiet bar. Time to think before he phoned Dolly. No, he'd drop in on her. She'd be home by six, and whatever her mood the earrings had been a good idea.

In the dim ambience of the Twilight Lounge, drink in hand, he prepared for the worst. Even if Dolly hadn't seen the paper, someone who worked in the salon might have. He could imagine a co-worker saying, "Oh, did you see that handsome customer of yours, Mr. Pollard, is in the society column?"

If she already knew, what [redacted] he tell her? He'd lied that he hadn't slept with Claire since [redacted] wedding night, that she had a terror of sex and childbirth. H[redacted] her he was actually relieved, because Claire was now repuls[redacted] fat and the marriage was entirely platonic. So instead of being jealous of Claire, Dolly referred to her as "poor thing." Except lately she had said, "Since it isn't a proper marriage, why don't you get a divorce? She's not Catholic, is she?"

Another lie. Yes, he said, Claire was Catholic, and very guilty about not wanting kids. "If I asked for a divorce she wouldn't agree. In her way she loves me—depends on me, anyway."

Dolly had said nothing more.

Ed ordered another double. The pianist at the bar played an oldie and a grey-haired drunk at the next table croaked the words. "Just Mollie and me, and baby makes three—"

No, divorce was out of the question. He needed Claire's money more than he needed Dolly, and he did want a son. He wasn't sure

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why a son was so important to him. It wasn't the reason Prince Charles had for carrying on the line. But maybe he did know. There was this new curly-blond fellow in the office with a high voice. Ed had suspected he was gay until he referred to his son and how they were both baseball freaks. Having a son created respect for a man.

Now he was sorry he'd hung up on Claire, but that taunting of hers about gays—twice today—had to stop. It wasn't funny. And he couldn't understand tolerance for the breed. Even Judge Hartman, after the game today, had said over a drink, "Sure, Paco is gay. Why point that out? He's a good waiter."

What's happened to morality? Ed wondered.

And how can I explain Claire's pregnancy to Dolly, if she knows?

Well, it was time to face her.

He drove his Bentley out to Dolly's apartment house on the edge of a Cuban area. The janitor as usual was sitting on the steps, and as usual Ed tipped him a tenner to watch the car.

"I won't be late," he said.

"For twenty I'll watch all night, mister."

Ed gave him another ten and climbed the steps and a flight of stairs to Dolly's door. His signal was three knocks. She opened the door a few inches, slid back the chain, and let him in. There was a jar of cold cream in her hand and her face was shiny with it, so he didn't kiss her.

But he wanted to. She was wearing the green-chiffon negligee that matched her eyes and glorified the auburn of her hair.

"Sit down," she said. "I'm glad you came. I'll be back in a minute."

To his horror, he saw the newspaper on the coffee table. It didn't look as if it had been opened, but he couldn't be sure. Dolly was neat, the sort who folded papers after reading them.

"Pour us a drink!" she called. "Sherry for me."

He kept her little bar cabinet well stocked. In the kitchen, he filled an ice bucket and brought it to the coffee table with glasses. The ice in his Scotch, he found himself gulping it. Nerves, he told himself. Watch it, pal. Keep your cool.

The newspaper seemed to dominate the room. Claire's mother was just the kind to trumpet her daughter's pregnancy. The old fool would be a doting nuisance as grandmother.

He sat down on the pale-yellow sofa. Looking around the room, made attractive by a year of his gifts, he noticed the chain hanging

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from the door and an idea popped into his head, an explanation for Claire's pregnancy. It was far out, but such things did happen.

Dolly returned, still wearing the negligee, her face made up and her hair combed. She sat opposite him and took a sip of sherry.

"I'm glad you use that chain on the door," he said. "You can't be too careful in this neighborhood—or even in mine, for that matter."

She looked at the newspaper. "Another murder."

He could feel his heart thumping and refilled his glass. "Busy today?" he asked, sitting down.

"Yes. There are two conventions in town."

He reached in his pocket and handed her the little box. "I've been thinking of you all day."

She gave him an odd little smile. "Yes, I guess you have." She unwrapped the box and opened it.

Ed leaned forward. "Do you like them, darling?"

"They're beautiful. But why me? Why not Claire?"

He stared at her as she closed the box.

"Surely a mother-to-be deserves a present?"

"She deserves all the petting I can give her, darling," he was saying. "I can't tell you the hell she's been through these past three months, but, being Catholic, she refused an abortion. God knows who the father is."

He plunged on through her silence. "A burglar broke in—"

Dolly laughed. "You're a terrible actor, my darling, and the script is worse. From what you've told me, with all the electronic security you've got in that house a burglar couldn't get over the wall."

"But he did! That's why I'm telling you to keep that chain on your door!"

"*So* kind of you to care." She laughed again. "You must have been rehearsing that yarn all day."

"Why can't you believe me? It's the truth."

"The *truth* is that Claire isn't a Catholic. I was getting fed up with your lies, so I did a little research—in newspaper files and at the Presbyterian Church where you were married."

"You never said you didn't believe—"

"No. I'm afraid I used you. I've appreciated your presents and your body. You're a good lover when you're sober."

He was drinking too fast and thinking too slowly. He had expected rage, not this cool attitude.

"One thing I do believe, Ed, because I saw her photo in the *Herald*

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files. Claire is certainly fat, perhaps because she's unhappy. *I'm* free to leave you, but she'll be tied with the baby. I'm sorry for her."

"Look," he burst out, "you don't know what I put up with! Why, today that bitch accused me of being a *fag!*"

Dolly laughed again. "You don't have the guts to be, Ed. Only the potential."

"Are *you* implying—"

"Just commenting, dear. Homosexuality is forever on your mind."

"But she knows I'm not. If she thought I was, she'd leave me."

Silky eyebrows raised. "Really?"

"It would be an insult to a woman, wouldn't it?"

"We can't compete with a male rival, if that's what you mean," Dolly said. She lit a cigarette, watching the smoke curl.

He got up, poured another drink, and returned to the sofa. Words slurring, he said, "You don' understand. Claire was only teasing." He lay back on the sofa and put a pillow under his head. Drowsy. Too much whisky on an empty stomach.

"Better take a nap, Ed," he heard her say. "You can't drive home safely this way."

So she did care about him. A little sexual persuasion and she'd come around. Later.

"Take off your shoes," she said.

He did, then lay back.

She sipped a second sherry as he slept. The room was silent except for the soft whir of the air-conditioning and the ticking of the ormolu clock on the bookcase—a birthday gift from Ed. He'd given her many gifts, including the rosewood furniture, the marble-topped tables, silver. All bought with Claire's money? Probably. Unless he was a star insurance salesman, which she doubted. She had no future with him, no hope of marriage and children. He demanded all of her free time, was even jealous of her friendship with other girls.

Half an hour passed. Ed was stretched out on his back. Though the sofa was too short for him and his legs dangled over the end, he looked comfortable, his sleeping face was smug.

She thought about Claire, obviously an innocent. Once the baby was born she'd probably cling to Ed for the rest of her life, trapped. But innocence didn't mean stupid. Claire teasing Ed about homosexuality implied a suspicion that he was secretly or unconsciously attracted to gays. Dolly thought, Sooner or later she'll get hurt and

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who am I to prevent it? Is it compassion for a stranger that I feel or the impulse to destroy that smugness?

Both.

If only she could send her a message.

She thought for a while.

He was so deeply, drunkenly asleep.

She was reading when Ed, awakened by two chimes of the clock, sat up. "Two o'clock? It can't be."

Dolly nodded. "Are you sober enough to drive?"

"Sure." He put on his shoes. "Let's have a kiss and make up."

"It's over," she said, snapping the book shut. "No recriminations, dear, no scene—just go."

No man begged a woman. "You'll be sorry," he said. "I've been good to you—"

"But not good *for* me."

"You think so now," he said groggily, going to the door, "but you'll feel differently. Phone me at the office Monday when you've cooled off."

At home in the bedroom, it wasn't cool. Claire hadn't turned on the air-conditioning, so he'd have to sleep on top of the sheet if he didn't want to awaken her. Stripped, he lay down quietly. The trouble was, he was now wide awake and hungry, but he didn't dare go down to the fridge—let sleeping wives lie.

Dolly couldn't dismiss him like a servant! He'd given her more than presents—he'd improved her, given her some culture! She should be grateful!

God, it was hot. Even though the bed was king-sized and he lay on top of the sheet, he could feel Claire's warmth. If she became aware of his presence, she was sure to turn and entangle him. Very cautiously, he moved away as far as he could.

Dolly. He entered a daydream. She would phone him Monday and apologize. Graciously, he would accept her apology. Everything would be all right.

He slept and awakened on his back, shedding a weird dream about La Fiesta. Sitting up, he saw that Claire had left the bed. She was probably at breakfast. Turning to look at the clock on the bedside table, he saw a note propped against it. Rubbing his eyes, he picked it up.

I'm seeing Mark this morning, it read, *and I won't be back here until you're packed and out of this house.*

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What the hell? Mark was her uncle, and a lawyer—a divorce lawyer. Ed couldn't imagine what he'd done. Slamming down the phone on her? That wasn't grounds for divorce. God, he needed a drink to clear his brain.

As he stepped out of bed, he looked down at his bare feet and gasped. Each toenail was painted scarlet. On the front of the right ankle was a little red heart and on the left, neatly lettered, was *Luv, Jim.*

DETECTIVERSE

STREET SMARTS

by JOHN LARGE

There was a P.I. known as Keach,
Employed by a college to teach.
Asking questions on crime,
He would rasp every time:
"Don't blurt out your answers, please—reach!"

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a ***NEW*** short story by

CARL MARTIN

"What's the trouble, Millie?" Roy asked in a tone of quiet resignation. His voice had a slight New York accent still evident after twenty years in Los Angeles.

"My friend was killed last night and the police say it was an accident."

"Why come to me after all these years?"

"Because I don't believe the police. And Jack once said you're the best P.I. in Los Angeles."

A case full of action and twist for Spangler Investigations, whose promising team consists solely of father, Roy, and apprentice son, Peter . . .

FOUND MONEY

by CARL MARTIN

A dense, water-laden cumulus cloud drifted slowly away from the face of the full moon. For a moment, light seemed to pour over the area around the pond as though a huge spotlight had been turned on the scene. John Kessler looked around guiltily, like a kid caught with his hand in the cookie jar.

He was a heavyset man in his fifties, with a bald head now shiny with sweat. He was not the athletic type and didn't look as though he ever had been. Nor was he dressed for physical exertion. He wore a baggy, dark-colored wool suit, the trousers of which were rolled to his fleshy pink thighs, and he was wading knee-deep in water a few feet from shore. The laces of his shoes had been tied together and the shoes hung from around his neck like a kind of primitive necklace. His shirt was open to the third button and his tie hung loose, dangling in the water when he bent forward.

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There was the chirp of a cricket and other night sounds Kessler couldn't identify. Every time he heard an unfamiliar sound, it seemed to fuel his apprehension, and he looked around nervously. His left hand gripped the handle of a metal detector, protruding from a rectangular control box from which extended a five-foot arm that ended in a dish-shaped, white-plastic assembly. In his right hand he carried an Army-type folding shovel.

He tucked the shovel under his left arm long enough to pull a pair of earphones from his suitcoat pocket. He fitted them over his ears, blotting out the night sounds, plugged the jack into the control box, and turned it on. The cricket's chirps were replaced by an electronic hum. Kessler plunged the dish-shaped assembly deep into the water and paused for a moment to adjust the knobs on the control box. Then he took small steps forward, parallel to the shore, slowly swinging the detector back and forth as he advanced.

The sound of the detector changed to a higher pitch, and he used the shovel to lift what he had found. It was an old oil can. He moved on. Three tin cans and a rusty automobile jack later, the detector let out a particularly strident howl, but there was nothing lying on the floor of the pond.

Kessler's demeanor changed. His eyes bulged with excitement and his breathing became more rapid. He bent over the spot and began scooping frantically with the shovel, throwing mud onto the shore. After two minutes of digging, his shovel hit something hard, metallic. He bent swiftly and reached deep into the water, unmindful of his sleeves. He came up with a mud-covered .50-caliber ammunition box. Wading ashore, dragging the box and his other gear, he pulled the phones from his ears.

The first thing he heard was barking. He looked across the pond toward the sound and saw the bouncing glow of a flashlight behind a slight rise. Then the dark shape of a large mongrel dog came into view and began to circle the pond toward Kessler, running low and fast.

Kessler hugged the box, shovel, and detector to his chest and ran in the opposite direction. The shovel slipped from his grasp before he had taken two steps, but he didn't stop to go back for it.

The dog caught up to him as he reached a rough-hewn wooden fence. On the far side of this four-foot barrier, a 1957 Chevy sedan was parked. The car had been restored to showroom condition and its many coats of hand-rubbed lacquer glowed in the moonlight.

Kessler spun and swung the detector at the charging mongrel,

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striking it on the nose. It yipped once, then ran to one side and kept its distance, but it continued to bark, pinpointing their location.

The beam of a powerful flashlight swept across the area, stopping at Kessler. Two men were running toward him with long, determined strides. They were still a hundred and fifty yards away but closing the distance rapidly. He turned back to the fence and, abandoning the detector, scrambled to get over it while clutching the ammunition box to his chest. "Whoever you are, stop right there!" one of the approaching men ordered in more of a scream than a shout.

Kessler had one leg over the top of the fence. He threw himself to the ground on the far side just as a shotgun blast shattered the night.

His pursuers were still too far away to be effective with a shotgun. The few pellets that reached him either whistled harmlessly overhead or glanced off the top rail of the fence. Kessler, gulping air through his open mouth, scrambled to his feet and dashed for safety behind the Chevy. He yanked open the driver's door and leaped inside. He'd had the foresight to leave his key in the ignition. One twist brought the engine roaring to life.

The men were closer now, and one fired another shot. A few pellets struck the rear of the car. Kessler popped the clutch and raced away, his spinning rear wheels kicking up a spray of dirt and gravel.

The two men, Carl and Vic Loftus, stopped running and watched the car disappear into the dark while they caught their breath. They were both powerful men in their late twenties, with wide shoulders and narrow hips. Although they were only cousins, they looked enough alike to be twins. Each wore his mouse-brown hair long, with a colored headband to keep it out of his eyes. Both wore faded Levis and plaid shirts that had been washed so many times most of the color was gone. Vic, the one carrying the double-barreled shotgun, shook the weapon impotently. "He's getting away," he panted.

"Not yet, he ain't." Carl gave the ground a vicious kick, then turned back in the direction they had come, running as fast as he could. "Come on!" he called back over his shoulder. "He has to take the long way! Maybe we can head him off before he gets to the highway!"

In the fleeing Chevy, Kessler bounced around on the seat, fighting to keep control as he tried to steer along the narrow farm lane without running off the track or hitting a tree.

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He risked a quick glance into the rearview mirror. There was no sign of pursuit, so he turned on his headlights and slowed. Driving was a bit easier now that he could see the ruts. He heaved an audible sigh of relief and pulled to a stop.

He turned on the interior light and pulled the ammo box to him. Holding the box between his knees, he wrenched it open. It was packed with bundles of currency.

His shoes were still hanging around his neck by their laces. He took them off and dropped them onto the seat beside the ammo box, put the car into gear, and got it moving again. He felt good, but he knew he'd feel even better once he reached the highway where his sedan would be just one more anonymous vehicle.

As he neared the highway, a battered grey pickup cut in front of him from a side lane and skidded to a stop, nearly blocking his way. He steered around it and out onto the highway, making a wide, looping turn without stopping. There was a squeal of brakes and a blaring of horns, but he managed to avoid a collision. He pressed the accelerator to the floor and sped on.

Behind him, the Loftus cousins had to wait for an opening in the traffic stream. As soon as a space appeared, Carl shot their old pickup into it with smoking tires. Vic, clutching the shotgun, bounced excitedly on the seat beside him. "Wooo-eee!" he shouted. "We're gonna catch that sucker yet!"

Kessler swerved from lane to lane, steering with one hand, and reached for the ammo box. He pulled it to him and began stuffing his pockets with the currency. When his pockets were full, he shoved the last few bundles inside his open shirt, shifting as they slid behind him.

He glanced into the rearview mirror and saw the pickup gaining on him. When he dropped his gaze back to the road ahead, he found that a station wagon had pulled in front of him from a side road. Too late to use his brakes, he swerved around it into the glare of a pair of oncoming headlights.

With the car bearing down on him and the station wagon on his right, he had to think fast. The only thing he could do to avoid a collision was leave the highway. He twisted the wheel to avoid the oncoming vehicle and sent the Chevy leaping into space. It crashed into the side of a dry culvert with the sound of rending metal and breaking glass.

A teenager halted directly behind the Loftus pickup. A CB an-

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tenna was mounted on the roof of his van and he held a microphone to his lips. "Yeah, Smokey, some guy just went flyin' off the Ventura Freeway north o' Bailey's Truck Stop. Must o' thought he was in a plane. Better get an ambulance up here 'cause I don't see anyone movin'."

A few drivers parked their cars so that their headlights illuminated the wreck. Others stood in clusters on the road shoulder, staring down at Kessler's car with their mouths hanging open, but no one attempted to climb down to it. Carl and Vic Loftus got out of their truck and stood quietly at the outer edge of the crowd, blending with the other onlookers.

A highway-patrol cruiser squealed to a stop and was followed almost immediately by an ambulance. After a short conference, the highway patrolman and two ambulance attendants cautiously picked their way down the steep grade to the wreck, the ambulance attendants dragging an empty litter behind them. When they reached the wreck, they found Kessler, blood seeping from one ear, wedged behind the steering wheel, unmoving.

The first attendant, Steve, reached through the shattered window to touch Kessler's neck. "There's a weak pulse. Let's get him outta there." His partner, Charlie Gower, a soft-looking young man with sun-bleached yellow hair, helped the patrolman pry open the driver's door. Then they eased Kessler onto the litter.

Carl and Vic watched the action from the road above with more interest than the other spectators. Then they moved to the spot where the rescuers would reach the road. As the injured man was carried to the ambulance, they followed close behind.

"I don't like the way this guy's breathin', Charlie," Steve said. "And he shows signs of cyanosis. We'd better put him on oxygen right away."

"Right," Gower agreed.

The attendants hoisted the litter into the ambulance and, working together, hooked up an oxygen mask for Kessler. Then Steve got out and walked around to take the wheel, leaving Charlie to care for their passenger.

The highway patrolman opened the rear door before they could leave. "See if that guy has any I.D. on him," he said. "I'll need his name for my report."

Charlie made an adjustment to the oxygen apparatus, then patted Kessler's pockets. When he reached into one of them, his jaw dropped open in surprise. His back was to the patrolman, so he was able to

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catch himself before alerting the man to his discovery. He checked a couple of more pockets before coming up with Kessler's wallet.

The highway patrolman, with Carl Loftus looking over his shoulder, checked its contents quickly, noting there was only thirteen dollars in the currency compartment. Then he copied Kessler's name and address from his driver's license and handed the wallet back to Gower. "Better stick that back into his pocket," he said. "They'll want to have it with his other property at the hospital."

Gower nodded, not trusting himself to speak.

The officer closed the door, slapped the side of the ambulance as a signal to Steve, and it slowly pulled away.

Carl walked to where Vic was waiting and they watched the ambulance out of sight.

"His name's John Kessler," Carl said thoughtfully. "Sounds kinda familiar, don't it?"

"I don't know," Vic answered doubtfully.

"Wonder where I heard that name before," Carl mused.

Vic looked surprised. "You mean you don't know who he is, either? Then why'd we keep chasin' him after he was off our land?"

Carl shrugged and made a sour face. "I don't know. 'Cause he ran, I guess." They took a couple of steps toward their pickup before Carl spoke again. "Wonder what he was up to."

The wail of the siren drowned out the tortured rasp of Kessler's strained breathing. In the dim interior light, Charlie Gower crouched beside the litter, his mind racing as fast as the ambulance. He emptied one of Kessler's pockets and hefted the bundles of currency thoughtfully. Then he considered the bulge of the other pockets. Finally he leaned over and slipped the oxygen mask from Kessler's face. Kessler began to shake and tremble as he labored for air.

Gower looked guiltily toward the front of the ambulance to make sure the driver's peephole was closed. When he turned back, Kessler lay still. Gower replaced the mask and emptied the rest of Kessler's pockets, putting the bundles into an empty instrument satchel.

Millie Kessler arrived at the Hollywood offices of Spangler Investigations at eight-thirty in the morning. She was a lean woman of medium height with long, straight orange-red hair—certainly dyed—and her fingers were covered with cheap rings. She wore a faded cotton work shirt, the sleeves of which had been cut off at the elbows, overpatched and frayed bell-bottomed jeans, and carried a large, battered leather shoulder bag close to her side protectively.

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Her dirty feet were bare. She could have been anywhere from forty to sixty. Were she wealthy, she might have been described as eccentric. Without money, she was, at the very most, bizarre.

Peter Spangler answered the door, struggling into a light-grey sportcoat. His black hair was mussed, his sportshirt only partially buttoned, and his shoes untied. It was obvious he had spent the night on the office couch. At twenty-six, he was the firm's legman, the one who performed all the routine tasks with which his father didn't want to be bothered.

"Yes?" he asked sleepily.

"I want to see Roy Spangler," Millie demanded in the manner of someone who expects an argument but doesn't mind a fight.

Pete looked at his watch and turned on his business voice. "Mr. Spangler won't be in for another half hour. If you'd like to wait—"

"Why not call him up? Tell him to hurry," she cut in.

At that moment, Roy Spangler entered the outer office from the hallway. He was a man in his late forties, of average height and build. He had thinning brown hair with a trace of grey at the temples. He wouldn't have needed a crowd to hide in—nothing about him attracted attention. It was only up close that one noticed the firm set of his jaw and realized there was a hard core to him.

"This lady would like to talk to you," Pete told him.

Spangler nodded, seeing Millie from the front for the first time. She was regarding Pete with a look of appraisal. "Fine," he said without expression, "we can go into my office." He led the way and opened the door for her. She continued to regard Pete for a few seconds, then followed him.

The office was sparsely furnished and had neither pictures nor plants. It had an orderly appearance, more to be expected in a monastery cell than a business office. Spangler indicated the chair beside his desk with a sweep of his hand. She took it.

"What's the trouble, Millie?" he asked in a tone of quiet resignation. His voice had a slight New York accent still evident after twenty years in Los Angeles.

"My friend was killed last night and the police say it was an accident," she said.

"Why come to me after all these years?"

"Because I don't believe the police. They're not—" she made a vague, groping gesture "—acting right. And Jack once said you're the best P.I. in Los Angeles."

"Jack?"

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"John Kessler—my friend. He was with the police himself for almost twenty years, so I figure he knew what he was talking about."

Spangler's lips compressed into a hard line at the mention of Kessler's name. He got to his feet, signaling the end of the interview. "Glad to hear I had Kessler's recommendation," he said drily, "but I never try to second-guess the police. If they say the man's death was an accident, you can be sure it was."

Millie remained seated, refusing to follow his lead. She crossed her arms and legs. "John Kessler left me everything he owned. He also left me with memories that make me feel good. If his death wasn't an accident, I want to know. I want you to look into this," she said stubbornly. "And I'm not leaving until you say you will."

Carl and Vic walked toward the pond, slowly backtracking Kessler's escape route. Both wore the same jeans and plain shirts they'd worn the night before. Neither looked as though he had been to bed. Vic was carrying the shotgun cradled in his right arm and Carl carried the metal detector Kessler had abandoned when he went over the fence. He led the way, looking at the ground.

"What's that thing?" Vic wanted to know.

"A metal detector."

"How d'ya know that?"

"'Cause—" Carl pointed to the large writing on the control box "—it says so right here."

"Oh, yeah. I saw that," Vic said, saving face.

They stopped at the spot where Kessler had shoveled mud onto the bank. The mound of damp earth and the tracks of Kessler's bare feet were plainly visible. So was the folding shovel he had dropped. Carl stooped and picked up the muddy tool.

"Looks like that guy was doin' some diggin' here last night," Vic said.

Carl pursed his lips thoughtfully. "Was he carryin' anything?"

Vic shrugged. "I d'know. It was pretty dark an' he was too far away to see much. Maybe we should go to the hospital an' ask him."

"No," Carl said. "We can't do that. I called the hospital before we come out here—while you was feedin' your face. He's dead. He was dead when he got there."

Vic frowned at the shotgun. "Was it anythin' we—?"

Carl shook his head. "I don't think so. We was too far away. But just in case, you better clean that thing soon's we get home." He turned to move on, but stopped suddenly, dropped the shovel to the

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ground, and gripped the detector like a baseball bat. Then he beat it against a tree until it was nothing but smashed and twisted metal and threw the remains far out into the pond where they sank from sight.

Vic watched open-mouthed. "Why'd ya do that?"

"'Cause I felt like it! I was thinkin' about when I was a kid—how Paw was always findin' people diggin' around out here. And I remembered where I heard Kessler's name before."

Millie strode out of Spangler's office with her head high. When she had arrived, she had seemed to be looking for a fight. Now it appeared she had found it and won.

Pete watched her leave, then entered his father's office and closed the door behind him. "Do we have a new client?" he asked.

"Unfortunately. I tried to turn her down."

"Why?"

"A man named Kessler. She wants me to look into the circumstances surrounding his death."

"Who was he?" Pete asked.

"A no-good snake," Spangler answered. "He was forced to resign from the L.A.P.D. a couple of years short of retirement. They caught him faking evidence he couldn't get any other way. He went from the Los Angeles police to some private security service. Then he was caught stealing from a client and served a few years in prison."

"Nice guy," Pete said.

"She seems to think so. Knew a different man, I guess." Spangler sat quietly for several beats, looking at his son. "Did you notice how she looked at you?"

Pete gave a puzzled smile. "Yes."

"Her name's Kessler now," Spangler told him. "Calls herself Millie Kessler. She used to be your mother."

The office of Captain Stuart of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department was large and cluttered. Four tall filing cabinets stood like soldiers at attention along one wall. A dark-brown-vinyl couch was against one wall, but it served as a catchall, not a place to sit. Stuart's scarred oak desk had been placed to give him a view of the parking lot. A window air-conditioner labored noisily, but the room temperature was only slightly cooler than the outside. There was a film of perspiration on the husky man's brow.

Roy Spangler entered after knocking once and stopped in front of

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the desk. There was no chair for visitors. The message seemed to be: If your name isn't Stuart, you don't sit in this office.

Stuart looked up from the folder he was reading and his face split in a pleasant grin. "It's good to see you again, Roy. What brings you among the forces of Law and Justice?" He reached across the desk to shake Spangler's hand.

"John Kessler," Spangler said simply.

Stuart's smile disappeared. So did the proffered hand. "So Ms. Kessler has decided to go over my head and take her suspicions to a civilian."

"Something like that," Spangler said, trying to keep it light.

Stuart sat back with a pained expression.

"Want to tell me about it?" Spangler pressed.

"There's nothing to tell. It was an accident. He got banged up pretty badly and was DOA at the hospital."

Spangler cocked his head to one side. "That's it? Nothing else?"

"Please, Roy. Give me credit for having some sense," Stuart said indignantly. "Kessler had more enemies than the Vietnam War. When someone like that dies in an accident, we make sure Fate wasn't given a helping hand. It wasn't. The CHP has a dozen witnesses who saw Kessler drive off the road to avoid a head-on collision. It was just his bad luck to dive into a dry culvert instead of coasting across an open field."

Spangler nodded. "That's what I figured." He pushed some papers back from the corner of the desk and sat down. "The funny thing is, Millie Kessler is sure you're holding something back." He held Stuart with a steady gaze. "And so am I. I was a cop too long not to, as the kids say, pick up some strange vibes here. So, what are you leaving out?"

"Okay," Stuart sighed. "It's not worth throwing you out of my office over, so I'll tell you. When Kessler was stripped at the hospital, they found two bundles of fifty-dollar bills under his shirt in back. Five thousand dollars. Cash. And there was a .50-caliber ammunition box on the floor of his car. The box looked as though it had been buried a long, long time. It had fresh, damp earth on it, like he'd dug it up a short time before. Also, he was barefoot, and his feet were covered with the same kind of mud as the box."

"So," Spangler said, "you think there's a chance he had some dirty money buried and killed himself right after digging it up. Hell, five thousand dollars isn't very much money any more. There are a lot

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of ways he could have come by it honestly. It doesn't have to be his stash of old bribes, payoffs, or whatever."

"No, it doesn't," Stuart agreed. "But those bills were all silver certificates. Silver certificates haven't been in circulation in over twenty years." He waved a hand in the air, as though erasing everything he had said. "Look—the SOB's dead. And he died in an accident. He gave law enforcement a bad name in the past, and I can't see where digging into this can serve any good purpose. Let's let it end here."

Roy Spangler got to his feet. "I think you're probably right, but—"

"But?"

"But that's a decision Millie Kessler will have to make," Spangler said.

Charlie Gower let himself into his small apartment and locked the door behind him. As an afterthought, he put the chain on the door, too. The room held the odors of old cooking and older dust. It hadn't been cleaned or aired since he moved in.

The worn furniture in the living room was a mismatched collection of thrift-shop bargains. He went to a sagging couch and sat in the center of it, then he dumped the money from the instrument satchel onto the coffee table in front of him. He fondled the bundles for a few seconds before beginning to count.

When he finished, a low whistle escaped his lips. "One hundred and ninety-five thousand dollars," he whispered in an awed tone.

Roy Spangler arrived early for the second day in a row, but Pete was already at his desk in the outer office. "How did the new case go?" he asked his father.

"Better than expected, and it's finished. There aren't many cases where I earn my fee as easily."

Surprised, Pete asked, "You mean you're going to send her a bill?"

"No, I'm going to hand it to her. She'll be here in a few minutes to hear my first and final report. Is there any reason I shouldn't take her money?"

"No—I guess not," Pete answered.

Roy had time to read only a few telephone messages when the door was opened and Pete was ushering Millie into his office. Pete stood in the doorway, watching her soberly as she approached the desk. She was barefoot again and her orange hair was mildly disarrayed. As before, she was dressed in denims and a print top, giving

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her the appearance of an old woman clinging to youth with cracked and broken nails.

"You don't waste any time, do you?" she said, taking the seat beside Spangler's desk. "That's good. At the prices you charge, you shouldn't. What'd you find out?"

"Well, Ms. Kessler—"

"Call me Millie. After all, we're old friends."

Spangler ignored the interruption. "You were right—and you were wrong." He told her what he had found out.

She got to her feet. "So Stuart thinks Jack was up to something when he died."

"The things that point that way are all circumstantial," Spangler said.

"Sure, they are," Millie sneered. "Like minnows in the milk. Save the rosy picture for someone who needs it. I have no illusions about Jack. I know I'm about the only person who liked him, let alone loved him. That's why I was afraid someone might have hurt him. The fact is, I agree with Stuart—Jack probably was up to something. If so, I'd like to know what. And if it turns out he wasn't, I'll feel better about spending that five thousand."

She looked down at her bare feet and seemed to realize she didn't look very prosperous. "My credit's good for another day of your time, isn't it?"

Spangler hesitated a moment, then nodded.

"Good," she said. "I want it. Keep digging. See if you can find out where Jack was and what he was doing. Whatever it was, it came up suddenly. We were at the beach on the day he died. One minute he was talking to a kid with a raft, and the next thing I knew he was running to his car and speeding away."

Spangler walked her to the door. "I'll let you know if I find out anything," he said.

When she was gone, Pete said, "Are you *sure* that's my mother?"

"Positive," Spangler told him. He leaned back in his chair and put his feet on the corner of the desk. Neither man spoke for a few minutes.

"Was she always that way?"

"What way is that?"

"You know—flaky?"

"No, she never was—and she isn't really now. She walked out when you were a baby because we'd married too young. She wasn't

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ready for the responsibility. And she didn't want to be a cop's wife, either."

"Aren't you angry? I'm so mad at her I could—"

"I used to be, but not any more. I used to spend hours imagining the conversation we'd have if I ever saw her again. Then yesterday, I realized it doesn't matter. That's all in the past. It's over with." Spangler took his feet off the desk. "Did you get a good look at her, a really good look?"

Pete nodded. "Sure, I did. She's a mess."

"She's your mother. You had it tough being raised by your grandparents, but her life probably wasn't any easier."

"Sure, but—"

"Do you like yourself?" Spangler asked suddenly. "Do you like the person you've become?"

"Yes. Yes, I do," Pete said positively.

"Well, you have her to thank. Intentionally or not, she had a big influence on your life."

Pete nodded slowly. "One thing bothers me. You said Kessler used to be a policeman. How could she get involved with him when one of the reasons she left you is that you were a cop?"

Spangler shrugged. "I'm sure you know someone who got divorced, then turned around and found someone who was a carbon copy of the person they left."

Pete was thoughtful. "And another thing," he said. "This case of hers. No one needs a .50-caliber ammo box to bury two bundles of money. A soup can would be big enough."

"That's the only thing about this case I like," his father said. He stared at the ceiling for a second. "Yes," he said, warming to the idea. "It opens up some interesting possibilities. Pete—find out where Kessler's car is. I think we should take a look at it."

"What do you expect to find?"

Spangler tapped his temple with his index finger. "Clues, Watson. Clues."

Carl and Vic Loftus sat at the table in the kitchen of their farmhouse. Spread out before them were several newspapers. Carl pounded the table with his fist. "There's nothin' in the papers about anybody findin' anythin'. But we know he did. Why else would he run like he done? Someone musta snatched it for his own self—the cop, one o' the ambulance guys, or someone at the junkyard where

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they took the wreck. Let's look in the phonebook and find out which yard is closest."

Roy and Pete Spangler walked down a broad aisle between rows of wrecked cars. A workman in greasy coveralls led the way. He pointed to what was left of the Kessler sedan and said, "That's the one you're looking for." As he turned and trudged away, Pete whistled. "Whew. Kessler sure made a mess out of a classic car."

The two men began examining the wreck separately. Pete stuck his head inside and picked up a clump of dry earth from the driver's seat. Spangler walked around the car with his right hand lightly brushing the body. At the rear, he stooped and leaned over the luggage compartment.

"Come here, Pete!" he called.

"Find something?"

"I think so. Take a look at this." Spangler pointed at the trunk lid.

Pete leaned closer. "You mean these places where the paint has been chipped by tire-thrown stones?"

"Think again. You don't find stone-chipped paint on the rear of a car, only on the front."

"Then what caused it?"

"Lots of things could have done it, but I think it was a shotgun," Roy said. "I saw the same thing ten, fifteen years ago. A stolen car had been used in a liquor-store holdup. The store owner took a couple of shots with his shotgun, but the getaway car was out of effective range. When it was found, it had this same, almost unnoticeable damage."

Pete straightened. "Now we know why Kessler was driving so fast—he was running from something."

"It tells us more than that," Spangler said. "If he was being chased, he wouldn't have taken the ammo box and left behind whatever was in it. And when he emptied it, he wouldn't have been stuffing money under his shirt unless he had already filled his pockets."

Pete nodded agreement. "Okay, who got the money?"

Spangler spoke slowly, working out the puzzle aloud: "I read the official report. There were a lot of spectators, but they didn't go near the crash site. It had to be either the highway patrolman or one of the ambulance attendants—they're the only ones who had a chance to take anything without anyone knowing. And since even a crooked cop would have had enough sense to cover his tracks by taking or

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hiding the ammo box, that leaves the ambulance attendants. It was probably the one who rode in back. He could have discovered the money in Kessler's pockets while examining him, but by then he'd have no way of covering up the ammo box even if he'd noticed it at the wreck. Also, he'd have been in the kind of hurry that would have made it easy to overlook the money under Kessler's shirt."

"That adds up," Pete said enthusiastically.

"Guess I'll have to talk to Millie again," Roy said.

"Why?" Pete asked.

"Because this changes things. Kessler may have had some help dying. If the money was discovered before Kessler was dead, the attendant may have pushed him over the edge. It would be impossible to prove, but it's a strong possibility. Also, I have a few questions to ask her." They started away from the car.

"Okay if I come along?" Pete said.

"No—I have another job for you."

Carl and Vic Loftus stood inside a glass-walled office to the right of the hospital emergency entrance. A stout woman wearing a white smock stood talking to them from the far side of a low counter. There was an open file drawer behind her and she held a manila folder in her hand.

"Yes, I thought so," she said, consulting the folder. "Steve and Charlie were the attendants on duty Monday night. If your uncle had any last words, they might have heard them. But Charlie quit this morning."

"Quit?" Carl said.

"Yes. He just up and quit—decided he didn't want to do this kind of work any more."

"Can you give us Charlie's name an' address?" Carl asked with exaggerated calm. "Maybe we should talk to him first. In case he decides to leave town or somethin'."

The woman read from the folder: "Charles Gower, 621 North Locust Street," she said. "That's in Tarzana."

Roy Spangler and Millie were in the living room of her apartment. The only view from the large picture window was the blank wall of a yellow-brick apartment building not twenty feet away. Spangler sat with a small notepad while Millie paced back and forth, chain-smoking. There was tension in the air, but the history they shared had no part in it.

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"Have you told the police what you suspect?" she asked.

"Not yet. I'm certain in my own mind, but I haven't any proof. In a way, that's a good thing. If they decide to reopen the file, I'm out of the picture. Private investigators aren't allowed to poke into open police cases."

Millie snuffed out her cigarette, then went to her shoulder bag on a nearby table and took out another. She placed it between her lips. "What do you do now?"

"Now I try to find out where the money came from and what happened to it."

"How?" she asked, digging in the bag for matches.

"By asking questions and getting answers. For a start, tell me again about the last time you saw Kessler."

Millie closed her bag without finding matches and took the unlit cigarette from her mouth. "That's easy. There was this long hot spell. Jack and I sat it out at the beach for days. It was almost too hot to move. That's why I was surprised to see him run out into the surf to talk to the kid with the raft. Next thing I knew, he was heading for his car. I still can't imagine what set him off."

She stood with her back to Spangler and played with her unlit cigarette for a moment.

"You two were happy?"

She broke the unlit cigarette in two and dropped it into the ashtray. Then she turned to look Spangler directly in the eye. "I was. Jack wasn't. He didn't have a pension and that bothered him. He was fired from the police department before he was eligible for one. He brooded about it a lot. Said he was the best investigator they ever had, but they never appreciated him."

"Did he tell you why he was kicked off the police force?"

"I think he did something illegal. There may be something about it in his scrapbook."

"Scrapbook?" Spangler echoed.

"Uh huh. He kept a scrapbook. He was always reading it."

"What do you call 'always'?"

"A couple of hours every night," she said.

"That's always," Spangler conceded. "Can you get it for me?"

The interior of Charlie Gower's apartment was unlit and the drapes were drawn, but even in the dim light that was able to filter in it was clear the room was in wild disarray. Old magazines and take-out food cartons littered the floor. A pair of Gower's white work

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trousers had been thrown carelessly over the end of the swaybacked couch. The air was foul with body odor, the smell of whiskey, and stale cigarette smoke.

There was a faint scratching at the outside door, then it swung open and Carl and Vic Loftus stepped inside. Vic, who was first through the doorway, had a thin-bladed knife in his right hand, the tool he'd used to push back the door's lock bolt. The sound of snoring came from behind the closed bedroom door. Carl smiled, but there was no humor in it.

They moved quickly to the bedroom door and stopped again. Carl reached under the jacket he was wearing and brought out the shotgun. Both its stock and barrels had been sawed off to make the weapon more compact. It looked even more ugly and lethal than it had before.

At a signal from Carl, Vic pulled the bedroom door open and they stepped into the room. An expensive leather suitcase stood on the floor at the foot of the bed. Charlie was sprawled across it on his back, sleeping with his mouth open.

Carl smiled again.

Spangler sat in his office with his jacket off and the sleeves of his shirt rolled up, revealing a faded tattoo of the Marine Corps emblem on his right forearm. He had just finished going through the scrapbook for the second time when Pete arrived.

He rushed into the room without knocking, his face flushed and excited. "Whoever was chasing Kessler is still after the money! Two men were at the hospital asking questions before I got there. They were given the name and address of one of the ambulance attendants." He added pointedly, "One who just quit his job."

Spangler stood and took a holstered revolver from his desk drawer. He clipped it to his belt and rolled down his sleeves. "Could they have been police?" he asked, coming around his desk and picking up his coat from the chair.

Puzzled, Pete answered, "No, I don't think so. The description I got made them sound like a couple of farmers. What makes you think the police may be in on this?"

"I'll tell you in the car. You drive. You got the attendant's address, didn't you?"

Once they were on the Hollywood Freeway, heading for the Ventura Freeway interchange, Spangler filled Pete in.

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"Did you ever hear of the Belmont kidnaping?"

"No." Pete kept his eyes on the road. The late-afternoon traffic was heavy.

"It happened about twenty-five years ago. A rich man's son was kidnaped and held for two hundred thousand dollars' ransom. The money was delivered in a .50-caliber ammunition box."

Pete whistled.

"Right," Spangler agreed. Then he continued, "The F.B.I. cracked the case in record time. The boy was rescued, but the kidnaper was killed in a shootout at a little farm this side of Ventura. The ransom was never recovered. The F.B.I. and other agencies dug up every inch of that farm. They even dragged a pond on the property. The only luck they had was bad."

Pete speeded up to pass a Toyota pickup with a camper shell on the back. "How do you know all this?"

"Kessler kept a scrapbook. It was devoted almost entirely to this one case. He was obsessed with it. Even after he'd been kicked off the police force, he was still trying to find the money. Twelve years ago, when the farm was owned by a man named Loftus, Kessler was arrested and charged with trespassing on the property. He served thirty days for it."

"All that was in the scrapbook?"

"Yes, but there's more. After I picked up the scrapbook, I drove down to the beach. It didn't take long to locate the guy with the raft she told us about. The way Millie had talked, I thought he was some kid who had gone to the beach with his parents, but this 'kid' was in his twenties. And he wasn't playing in the water—he was treasure hunting. He remembered Kessler. Said the man got very excited when he learned that modern metal detectors will function under water."

"That all fits, doesn't it?"

"So does the accident. Kessler drove his car off the road only a few miles from the Loftus farm."

Pete got into the right-hand lane, slowed, and took the Reseda Boulevard off-ramp for Tarzana. That put them only four blocks from the building where Charlie Gower lived. He parked in front, and they went up to the apartment together.

The door was several inches ajar. Spangler put his hand against it and pushed. It swung open silently.

"Mr. Gower?" Spangler called. When there was no answer, he entered, calling again: "Mr. Gower?"

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They found Charlie Gower in the bedroom. He had been killed by a shotgun blast fired at close range.

Spangler forced his eyes to sweep the room once, then he turned away from the body. "Pete—see if you can find a telephone somewhere," he said.

Captain Stuart and some of his men were waiting in three cars near the turnoff for the Loftus farm. Pete pulled to the end of the line and shifted into Park, leaving the engine running. Stuart walked back to talk to Roy.

"You can call the shots on this one, Roy, if you want to. Your judgment has been fine so far. How do you want to handle it?"

"Code three," Spangler said without hesitation. "Go in with flashing lights and siren blaring. Kessler was chased from here, so it figures the men doing the chasing are based here. That might panic them. If not, you brought a search warrant, didn't you?"

Stuart nodded.

"I'll bet you find both the money and the murder weapon. They probably feel pretty safe."

Stuart returned to the lead cruiser. Pete put his car into gear and followed them down the dirt road. As they neared the farmhouse, Carl Loftus dashed frantically outside, carrying Charlie Gower's leather suitcase, and ran toward the old pickup truck. Right behind him was Vic, waving the shotgun.

The lead cruiser cut sharply in front of the truck, blocking its escape. The other police cars pulled up beside it and Pete slid to a stop in the rear, kicking up a cloud of dust.

Vic's head swung wildly as he looked for a way out. Then he raised the shotgun and fired at the lead cruiser. Pellets struck the hood and right side. He was about to fire again when he thought better of it. He was looking down the barrels of half a dozen revolvers. He dropped the shotgun and raised his hands high over his head.

As the deputies were putting them in handcuffs, each of the cousins blamed the other for Gower's murder. The ransom money was in the leather suitcase.

"That was fast," Pete said. They were in his car again, heading back toward Hollywood.

"That's the way it happens sometimes," Spangler said.

"God! Aren't you excited?" Pete banged the steering wheel once with the side of his fist.

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"I've been at this too long to get excited. Now I just get tired. All I want to do is go home and get some sleep."

"You still have to tell, uh, Millie what happened."

"No, I don't," Spangler said. "I don't feel like talking to her right now. That's your job."

"My job?"

"Remember—anything I don't feel like doing is your job. You're the apprentice here. Besides, you've been acting as though you want to talk to her. Go tell her what happened and—talk. Drop me off at home on the way."

Pete pressed harder on the accelerator and the car picked up speed.

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THE JURY BOX
by JON L. BREEN

Though I should know better than to make early-season predictions of awards candidates, it's impossible to imagine this month's lead item not being at least a nominee for both the Edgar and Anthony awards as best American first mystery novel of 1988. The author takes a difficult structure, with the two parts of the novel separated by forty-four years, and creates a cohesive story with a great deal to say about race relations in the South of the World War II years and today. A great part of the author's achievement is his sympathetic view of the character who would seem to be among the story's most obvious villains: the small-town South Carolina sheriff who extracts a wrong confession from the suspect who will become the nation's youngest subject of an execution.

**** David Stout: *Carolina Skeletons,* Mysterious Press, $16.95. In 1944, Linus Bragg, a fourteen-year-old black in the wrong place at the wrong time, is accused of the murder of two little white girls. Without ever quite understanding what is happening to him, he is sent to the electric chair. In 1988, James Willop, a Newark journalist newly out of work and a nephew of Linus Bragg, fulfills a promise to his dead mother and travels south to find out what really happened. Willop, fair-skinned and often able to pass for white, does solve the mystery, which, while cleverly constructed, takes a back seat to character and theme in this extremely effective book.

**** Thomas Harris: *The Silence of the Lambs,* St. Martin's, $18.95. Dr. Hannibal Lecter, who first appeared in the author's memorable *Red Dragon* (1981), again in the early stages of this novel serves as one of the most bizarre armchair detectives in fictional annals. A sociopathic serial killer, under constant and careful guard, he is used by the FBI in an attempt to detect *another* serial killer, this one known as Buffalo Bill for reasons I wouldn't dream of reporting here. Despite virtuoso construction, literate style, character insights, and impressive detective work, this is a volume that will be shunned by readers who object to very graphic descriptions of sadism and violent death. As a partial olive branch to offended female readers, Harris creates a very well drawn and effective protagonist in FBI trainee Clarice Starling. A sequel is strongly hinted in the closing pages, and I doubt Harris will be another seven years between books.

**** Tobia Wells: *Of Graves, Worms, and Epitaphs,* Doubleday/Crime Club, $12.95. Wells, better known as Stanton Forbes and (in the mystery digests of the Fifties) DeForbes, is among the most adventurous and inconsistent writers of mysteries. Wellesley, Mas-

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sachusetts police chief Knute Severson, who debuted as a young Boston cop over twenty years ago, is one of the few series sleuths to age with the calendar. Here he investigates a mysterious series of deaths in an upscale retirement home and suffers some shocking and painful personal traumas along the way. An astonishing number of elements are present for such a short novel, and what initially seems a scattershot approach ultimately comes together as a satisfying thematic whole. This rather amazing novel ranks with the author's best.

*** Bernard Cornwell: *Wildtrack,* Putnam, $17.95. Any British writer of first-person thrillers, particularly if the narrator is involved in some kind of sporting endeavor, must invariably be likened by reviewers and publicists to Dick Francis. Sometimes the comparison is wide of the mark, but here it's right on target. Even the title sounds like Francis, and the hero, yachtsman and Falklands hero Nick Sandman, begins the book in the kind of excruciating pain that must come eventually to every Francis hero. His narration displays the Francis style and, even more conspicuously, the Francis grit.

*** Lilian Jackson Braun: *The Cat Who Sniffed Glue,* Putnam, $15.95. The series about Jim Qwilleran and Koko (Siamese cat and semi-supernatural detective) began in hard covers in 1966, made a comeback in 1986 in paperback original, and now returns to hardback. It's easy to see why the series has developed such a following: some writers of humorous cozies seem to be trying too hard, but Braun never does. Despite a surprisingly high body count (and an unusually large cast of living characters, too), the violence stays offstage and the reading is restful and relaxing. The locale is Pickaxe City, county seat of Moose County, "400 miles north of everywhere."

*** June Thomson: *Rosemary for Remembrance,* Doubleday/Crime Club, $12.95. Detective Inspector Jack Rudd investigates murder at a British summer school for aspiring writers. Thomson combines literate puzzle-spinning (complete with Shakespearean clues) with in-depth characterization and sensitive style. She should be discovered by readers who enjoy Ngaio Marsh and P. D. James.

*** Fredrick D. Huebner: *Judgment by Fire,* Fawcett Gold Medal, price unknown. Regional mystery writing is at an all-time peak, and Huebner must be counted one of the most talented authors of the "Seattle school." Whether defending an arson/murder case in court or trying to solve it private-eye style when the trial comes to an unexpected end, lawyer Matthew Riordan is a good companion and an exciting guide to his city.

** Carlton E. Morse: *Stuff the Lady's Hatbox,* Seven Stones Press (Star Route, Box 50, Woodside, CA 94062), $16.95. In what must be the most unexpected 1988 reappearance of a detective series, L.A. private eyes Jack Packard and Doc Long of the fondly remembered radio serial *I Love a Mystery* make their first appearance in a novel.

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(Third partner Reggie York is mentioned but never appears.) The 87-year-old author, who also created the legendary soap opera *One Man's Family,* keeps the action moving at a fast clip. The unspecified period seems to be the Forties or Fifties; the locale is mostly Las Vegas. The episodic structure, dialogue-dependent narrative style, and colorful but sanitized language definitely suggest radio, while the inexplicit titillation recalls *Spicy Detective.*

Among the reprints is the fourth book about California private eye Kinsey Millhone, Sue Grafton's 1987 *"D" is for Deadbeat* (Bantam, $3.95), not her very best but a pleasure nonetheless. *Death of a Dormouse* (Mysterious Press, $3.95), despite its male author (Reginald Hill writing as Patrick Ruell), was one of the very best romantic suspense novels of 1987, a gem of plotting and writing.

Ellery Queen's 1958 masterpiece, *The Finishing Stroke* (Carroll and Graf, $3.95), concerns murder at a Westchester, New York house party in 1929. Besides a typically elaborate puzzle plot, the novel anticipated the recent vogue for nostalgia mysteries by a couple of decades. International Polygonics continues its admirable series of classic reprints with Charlotte Armstrong's *The Unsuspected* ($4.95), a fine, pure suspense novel that was a matter of controversy on its 1946 publication because it didn't keep the murderer a secret; Jonathan Latimer's 1936 hard-boiled classic, *The Lady in the Morgue* ($4.95), which has one of the most arresting first chapters in mystery-fiction annals; and Anthony Boucher's *Rocket to the Morgue* ($4.95), originally published as by H. H. Holmes, a 1942 landmark concerning impossible murder among science-fiction writers and fans, solved by nun-detective Sister Ursula.

While nothing could excite me less than a collection of excerpts from novels, the very existence of *McBain's Ladies* (Mysterious Press, $16.95) shows what a major figure Ed McBain (a.k.a. Evan Hunter) has become in mystery fiction. I'd urge any reader new to the 87th Precinct series to seek out the original novels rather than these selections about some of the continuing female characters. An accompanying critical commentary might have given the book more point.

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In the cool darkness beneath the desert floor, Holloway was forced to reflect on his rashness in mounting a solo expedition with borrowed money. Borrowed—he sneered at himself. Why try to justify it now? The courts wouldn't call it borrowing, would they?

Patrick Ireland, 41 years old, lives in Sutter Creek, California, with his wife Coleen and their nine-year-old son Ethan. "The only school, as I see it, that any would-be author need attend," he says, "is the school of experience. You must feel *to write, as an artist must* see *to paint or sculpt." As for reading other writers, those who have influenced him, "in order of impact," are Robert Sheckley, C. S. Forester, Richard Matheson, Alfred Bester, Fredric Brown, and Harry Harrison.*

Incidentally, in the April 1987 issue we published an equally impressive first story titled "The Witness" by Patrick Irelan, who is a resident of Iowa. What a difference a "d" makes . . .

DISCOVERY

by PATRICK IRELAND

Caught in the brilliant beam of Holloway's flashlight, the earthenware jar stood distinctly apart from the centuries-old litter of artifacts that crowded the stone shelf. The chamber smelled of ages passed in underground solitude, the last eyes to behold this scene having been dust for two dozen centuries.

Holloway, transfixed by the full impact of this notion, stood breathless, simply staring at the jar. It was about fourteen inches tall, somewhat wider than that at the middle, giving it the shape of a giant onion, and beautifully enameled with geometric patterns that drew the eye into it like a whirlpool. The sheet-lead seal was still intact. Fascinated by its beauty and antiquity, he extended a reverent hand to its curving surface. It was cool to the touch, its

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glassy smoothness recalling to his mind the brandy snifter he'd held two weeks earlier as Sabeth had listened to his explanation of the need for money.

"You know I do my best work alone, dear," he'd told her. "Besides, Dr. Wilson insists that expeditionary funding be used only to develop proven sites. With just a few thousand, I can solo on this one."

"But, Eric, why didn't you show him the map? If it was enough to convince you, surely—"

He'd waved his meerschaum impatiently. "If I'm ever to rise above Associate Professor, I need to earn credit for my own discoveries. As Department Head, Wilson could easily claim this find as his own. I've worked too hard to let that happen, Sabeth. That's why you've got to talk to your father. Convince him to lend me the money."

"He won't agree to that, Eric, and you know it. He's never been very fond of you." She'd seen the anger surge into his eyes. "I'm sorry, but it's true."

"But this would prove to him that I'm not the screwball he thinks! I'm certain this is a prime site. And he'll share the glory. So will you." But she had just sat there, shaking her head, refusing to meet his eyes.

Caressing the jar now, Holloway smiled. Now it would be different. Now they would all see, the fools. Absently, he adjusted the wire-rimmed spectacles on his aquiline nose and placed the flashlight under his arm to allow both hands to encircle the base of the ancient jar. Careful as a surgeon with a beating heart in his hand, he lifted the jar from the shelf and cradled it.

He realized he had been holding his breath, and exhaled with satisfaction. The flashlight slipped from beneath his arm and clattered to the stone floor, winking out and leaving Holloway in total darkness. He heard the flashlight rolling down the slope away from him and suddenly his pulse was hammering in his ears. Despite the coolness, a trickle of sweat coursed down his spine. He struggled to compose himself. He absolutely could not afford to panic. Blinking and squinting, he strove desperately to detect some measure of light. It was useless. There could be no random light in this chamber, deep beneath the surface of the desert.

Cautiously he sank to his knees and eased the jar to the floor. Backing away from it, he crawled along the sloping plane, blindly searching for the flashlight, praying it wasn't broken.

The sounds of his progress seemed unnaturally loud in the inky

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blackness. He swept both hands in wide arcs along the gritty stone floor, stirring the dust of ages. Though near the edge of hysteria, his mind persisted in worrying about the damage he was doing to the knees of his trousers.

His fumbling right hand brushed against something smooth, warm, tubular—the flashlight! He clutched it and flicked the switch back and forth. Damn, it was broken after all!

He took several deep breaths, striving to master the rising panic, willing himself to concentrate. Of course! He had a book of matches in his shirt pocket! With a sigh of relief, he congratulated himself for having clung to the habit of pipe-smoking even though Sabeth despised it and drew the matchbook from his pocket, opened it, and counted the matches. One, two— His breath caught. Two? Only two matches?

What could he do? He had to think. He had to overcome the urge to light either of the precious matches until he could settle on a plan. Feverishly, he searched his other pockets. His notebook! The pages would burn, of course. But for how long? Surely not long enough to light his way back out of this deathtrap. Drawing back his shirtsleeve, he consulted the luminous face of his wristwatch and calculated. It had taken him just under four hours to work his way in to this point—but that included wandering down many fruitless corridors and he'd marked the twistings and turnings with his grease pencil, so the return trip would be much quicker. With adequate light, call it forty minutes.

Without adequate light, he could forget it.

Think, damn it! What else might be found that would burn? He could recall having seen nothing combustible as he'd worked his way in. The ancients had carved this catacomb into solid rock and had needed no shoring timbers. What artifacts he'd found were all pottery or carven stone.

Forty minutes. The pages of his notebook wouldn't last five. He felt a crawling coldness and his thoughts drifted back to the moment when he'd realized that the money he needed for this expedition was right there under his nose. In the form of a Declaration of Power of Attorney.

It had been stupid of him not to have seen it sooner. Grandmother was becoming more senile every day—well taken care of in the rest home, but dependent on him to conduct her business and pay her bills with the little income she had: Social Security, retirement an-

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nuity, and a bit of interest on savings. She'd assigned him power of attorney a couple of years earlier so that he could endorse her checks and he had become so used to doing it that it hadn't occurred to him at first. Of course, he wouldn't touch the principal. After all, he only needed a few thousand. But how convenient that this dividend check had popped up just when he was at wit's end.

The teller at Grandmother's bank hadn't batted an eyelash when he'd presented the check—just counted out the forty-four hundred and change with a smile. And thanked him. Holloway had almost laughed at that. Almost. Anyway, he'd be repaying Grandmother's account soon enough. With a bounce in his step, he'd left the bank and taken the subway to a travel agency. Plane ticket (first class of course), luggage, hotel reservations in Cairo, rental car, a few necessaries, and he was soon on his way to the realization of his ambition.

Several boring hours into the flight, his enthusiasm had begun to pall as the gravity of his act penetrated his conscience. But he'd smothered his misgivings by reminding himself of the fame he was sure to win and by the time he'd checked into the hotel his resolve was firmer than ever.

In the cool darkness beneath the desert floor, Holloway now was forced to reflect on his rashness in mounting a solo expedition with borrowed money. Borrowed—he sneered at himself. Why try to justify it now? The courts wouldn't call it borrowing, would they? The law would have no sympathy for a man who had embezzled from his aged grandmother, no matter how important the reason. Well he needn't worry about the law now. He would suffer the consequences of his conceit right here, in this trap he'd unwittingly set for himself.

Slowly, bitterness rising in his throat, he made his way back to the earthenware jar he'd left on the floor of the chamber. His smug disregard for convention and propriety had led him here, alone. And here, it seemed, he would remain, his body perhaps ultimately to be discovered by one of the colleagues he had intended to humiliate.

He found the jar and caressed its smooth surface, wondering what might be inside. Though it hardly mattered now, he should at least open the seal and examine its contents. He owed it to himself to learn what he had made the ultimate sacrifice for.

Opening his pocket knife, he sliced into the thin lead sheet, carefully working the blade around the circumference of the jar's mouth

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He discarded the circle of lead and gingerly felt inside the vessel. What was this? It seemed to be a sheaf of— His fingers stiffened. Papyrus! Dozens of sheets of papyrus! The paper of the ancient Egyptians, so difficult to manufacture that it was used only to record the most important information. Any student of Egyptology knew that the majority of written words were carved in sandstone tablets. Here must be something of unique significance.

Trembling now, Holloway ripped several pages from his notebook and crumpled them together, forming a small cone, which he ignited with one priceless match. The resulting yellow glare blinded him for a moment. Then, as his eyes adjusted to the dancing light of his makeshift torch, he eagerly pulled the ancient pages from the jar and scanned them. They were covered with orderly lines of beautiful hieroglyphs, rendered in various colors of ink. He strained to make sense of them. Translation could be difficult under the best of conditions, and his sense of urgency didn't help.

The flames guttered, threatening to go out, and Holloway rapidly tore a few more pages from his notebook, feeding them carefully into the diminishing blaze. After a few minutes of eye-straining study, he realized that these records bore evidence that would set the science of Egyptology on its ear. This amazing document was a trade agreement—the long-argued link between ancient Egypt and Atlantis. Far more than enough to validate his conclusions, it would make the finder immortal as the Sphinx! Or would have, were he not trapped here with it far beneath the surface of the earth. He fed the last few pages of his notebook into the fire and tried to read further, only to find his eyesight blurred by tears of frustration. Moments later, his little fire was no more than a few glowing embers winking beneath a curling thread of acrid smoke.

So, this was it, then. All his lofty aspirations had led him to this ancient chamber, where, with a monumental discovery in his hand, he must perish. Consumed with an agony of futility and grief, he wept.

After a time, Holloway's senses returned. It dawned on him that papyrus must certainly burn. And, of course, one match remained. He shuffled numbly through the thick sheaf of ancient pages. Yes, if he were careful enough and burned only one page at a time, there was probably enough fuel here to light his way to safety. But what awaited him back on the surface, with or without his discovery?

Holloway fingered the matchbook.

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As sometimes quite agreeably happens, we connected with a second story by this issue's Department of First Stories author, Patrick Ireland, in time to publish both stories together. Now we're looking to publish a third story by this promising writer soon . . .

CHEAPSKATE

by PATRICK IRELAND

I get all kinds. Any rental-limo chauffeur does. Weddings, tips are pretty fair—people are usually happy. Funerals, forget it. Nights on the town vary: married couples, maybe a ten, sometimes twenty; single guys out to impress a dame, fifty bucks at least. Teeny-boppers, don't make me laugh. Unless you can relate to bubble-gum cards and maybe a Def Leppard cassette left in the tape deck. I take what comes. I have to. Ten bucks an hour on a twelve-hour shift pays the rent, but tips buy the little extras—like a decent lunch now and then. And that was what ticked me about this guy.

I came into the office this morning at nine o'clock. Max, the dispatcher, hands me my day's schedule. Four one-hour runs and a two-hour. Great. Well, at least it's a stretch limo today. That's some consolation. You tend to get noticed when you drive a stretch. The standard limos just make you look like a funeral pilot. Some of the other drivers kick about pushing a stretch in traffic—I tell them I'll swap any time. I can handle the big iron.

Anyway, about this guy I mentioned. He was the two-hour shot. First run of the day, ten o'clock pickup. With a decent tip, I can have lunch at Dolly's Steak House and get to my one-thirty pickup no sweat. I go to my locker and get dressed. Black, vested suit, black tie, shoes, and cap. I brush the patent-leather visor with my sleeve and head out to the garage. Vinny, the detail kid, already has my limo staged and idling. He asks me can I vacuum out the rig when I get in tonight, he's got a hot date. I tell him yeah, sure. What the

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hell, Vinny's a good kid. Besides, he'd put an extra good polish on the stretch just for me. I slide into the leather and ease out the driveway.

Half an hour later, I'm at this so-so apartment complex, looking for my guy. After a minute, he shows and I jump out to open the door. He's a good-sized lug wearing an outdated suit. His necktie's crooked and clumsily knotted.

"Mister Blaine?" I say, knowing better.

"The name's Blaire," he grunts, eyes hidden behind mirrored sunglasses.

"Just making sure, Mister Blaire. I get all kinds."

He dives into the seat without another word and I shut the door nice and easy. When I slide behind the wheel, he says, "Downtown," then *zzip!* up goes the privacy window. Okay, fine. I glide away from the curb and ease into traffic.

Don't get the idea that the privacy window bothers me—it doesn't. I've been driving limos long enough to know that people who pay for the toys want to play with them. Next I hear him turn on the TV. I enter the freeway on-ramp, watching the mirror to merge nice and smooth. Any minute now— The intercom buzzes. I'd already reached for the receiver.

"Yes, Mister Blaire?"

"Could you stop at a convenience store? I need some cigarettes."

"Yes, sir. Can do." At least it wasn't Burger King. Seems like every jerk who rents a limo thinks he's the only guy in the world clever enough to have himself taken to a fast-food drive-through window. They think it impresses the cashiers. I can tell you, it doesn't.

I coast off the freeway and onto the Esplanade. The Circle K store is just two blocks from Dolly's, where I hope to have lunch. I pull right up in front and jump out to whip open the door. Blaire climbs out and heads into the store. I shut the door and stand ramrod straight, hands clasped behind my kidneys, rocking back and forth on my heels. I'm looking down the Esplanade at Dolly's neon sign, thinking about a sixteen-ounce top-sirloin, baked potato with sour cream, and a large iced tea.

Blaire pops back out, tucking a folded paper bag into his breast pocket. I open the door and bow him into the car. As I roll out of the parking lot, the intercom buzzes again.

"Yes, Mister Blaire?"

"Do you know where the Four Seasons Shopping Mall is?"

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"Certainly, sir."

"Good. Head over there, will you? Oh, and do you have a pen I could borrow?"

"Sure thing, Mister Blaire." The privacy window zips down and I hand him my Paper Mate. The window zips right back up again. He doesn't bother to thank me. Nice guy.

I cruise back to the freeway, concentrating on a smooth ride and a decent tip. From the back I hear Lucy whining at Desi. Fifty bucks an hour this guy's paid so he can watch a rerun of a thirty-year-old TV show. In black and white.

Twenty minutes later, I slide off the freeway and melt into heavy surface traffic, jockeying for the mall. I see a window in the stream of cars and smoothly insert the stretch, feathering the brake. Like oil on glass, I ooze into the four-hundred-acre parking lot and slow to a crawl, waiting for directions from Blaire.

He has me drop him at the north entrance to Capwell's Department Store, just past the Wells Fargo Bank. He tells me to circle the block of stores and meet him at Capwell's south entrance. Ten minutes later, he shows up carrying a well filled paper bag. I pop open the door and usher him in. He seems nervous. Preoccupied.

Once away from the mall, he directs me to the Greyhound bus depot. Now *this* is an original. Bus depot in a stretch limo.

At the bus depot, he tells me to wait, ducks into the lobby with the paper bag, and a minute later returns without it. I glide back into traffic, checking the digital clock. He's got half an hour left. He directs me back to the apartment complex where I'd picked him up. I'm thinking of steak, medium rare, and driving like a float in a parade.

With five minutes to spare, we roll up to his digs. I step out and open the door, standing at attention and offering him a 500-watt smile. Blaire breezes past me with a "Thank you" and is history. No tip!

I'm so jerked out of shape, I find myself in front of Dolly's before I realize I can't afford the goddamn salad bar, let alone a steak. I cruise on past, stomach growling, and whip into the Circle K, where I pick up a couple of microwaved burritos and a Coke. I get my stuff and head to the cash register, where the clerk is eyeballing the limo. As he's counting out my change, he says, "You were just in here a while ago, right?"

"Yeah."

"So who was that guy? Some rich nut or what?"

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"Just a cheapskate, that's all. It's a rental."

"Oh, I get it. Where'd you take him? It seemed pretty strange that a guy in a limo would come in here and buy a one-dollar money order and then ask for an empty shopping bag."

"Beats me, pal. See you around."

I hit the trail, wolfing down the burritos and trying to keep the slop off my suit. The rest of the day is no better.

When I get back to the barn, I'm vacuuming out the limo and I find a wadded-up ball of paper. Unfolding it out of curiosity, I see that it's a carbon receipt of a money order for one dollar. And get this: handwritten on the face of it is I HAVE A GUN. KEEP QUIET. FILL THE BAG WITH 10's, 20's, 50's. BE SMART AND STAY ALIVE.

My mind is ticking over at a thousand r.p.m. A guy standing in line in a bank with a money order in his hand is the most natural thing in the world. A bank robber getting away in a limo the most unnatural. Misdirection at both ends. A dollar invested in a camouflaged robbery note, a hundred for the getaway, and two bits for a locker at the bus depot. I think the cops might be interested in Blaire's address. In fact, I'm sure of it. Too bad he didn't tip me. If he had, I'd have gone to Dolly's instead of Circle K and never learned about the money order. I never would have made the connection. Besides, the cheapskate never gave me back my pen.

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a *NEW* Rand story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

"You don't know me," Rand told Marcus Cutler. "I was in Intelligence work, with Concealed Communications, for a good many years."

"I don't know anything about codes," the old man said. "I worked on maps."

"I'm sure you were very good at it. You must have been, to be assigned to the War Rooms."

"I barely remember those days."

"I was interested in one day in particular," Rand told him. "It would have been November sixth, nineteen forty."

Cutler frowned. "The day after Guy Fawkes?"

"That's right."

Encouraged, Rand leaned closer. "Another colonel came to the War Rooms that day—an M.I.5 officer named Rathbone. Do you remember meeting him . . . ?"

THE SPY AND THE GUY FAWKES BOMBING

by EDWARD D. HOCH

The nightly air raids over London began on 7 September 1940, when the first German bombers appeared at tea time out of a lazy afternoon sky. They were to continue for 76 nights, missing only the night of 2 November, when weather conditions were too poor for flying. The weather was better three nights later, on Guy Fawkes Day, and the planes did not need the traditional bonfires—banned during wartime—to guide them to their target.

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There were still fires burning in the East End of London from the previous nights' raids.

What was different about the Guy Fawkes bombing was that it wasn't limited to London and other large cities. It struck also at several top-secret RAF bases located in the South of England. Casualties and damage were high, and it wasn't until the following day that Military Intelligence succeeded in determining the source of the information that had guided the enemy planes. It was Colonel Rathbone himself who took the news to the underground War Rooms in Whitehall from which Churchill and other high officials were controlling the war in those dark days.

A pretty WAAF secretary showed Rathbone into Major Penrose's makeshift office beneath the Whitehall buildings. The older officer glanced around distastefully at the white wooden beams and said, "It's not pretty, but I suppose it's safer than up above."

"Indeed it is," Major Penrose agreed. He was a handsome man of about forty with sandy hair and pleasant blue eyes. Rathbone was certain the WAAF secretary enjoyed working for him, though Penrose kept a framed picture of his wife prominently on his desk. "We sometimes work through the night here with the raids going on above us." He lit a cigarette with a nervous hand. "What can we do for M.I.5 today?"

"The daily operations reports no doubt informed you of yesterday's multiple raids on RAF bases."

"Of course. Six were hit, and at least two sustained considerable damage."

"They were among the most secret in the South of England."

"How do you think the Germans learned their exact locations?"

Colonel Rathbone opened his briefcase. "This radio message was intercepted two nights ago and deciphered by the code-breaking unit at Bletchley Park. Unfortunately, by the time they completed their work, last night's raids were already under way."

Major Penrose gave a soft whistle. "This is serious."

"More serious than you may realize. The leak came from here."

"Let me have some coffee brought in and we'll look this over," the major said. "I'm sure you must be mistaken. The Cabinet War Rooms are quite secure."

The two men studied the message at some length over coffee, comparing the various numbers to certain other numbers contained in top-secret lists. "It's clear," Major Penrose said at last. "You're

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right, of course, Colonel. These numbers are the latitudes and longitudes of our RAF bases, including the six that were hit last night."

"The Germans obtained the locations from this coded message," Rathbone said, stabbing his finger at the document. "There is a spy in your midst."

"Anyone living nearby might know the location of one or two bases. But six? More than six, really. There are ten sets of coordinates listed here. What happened to the other four that weren't hit?"

"Three are too far north, out of range." Colonel Rathbone stirred some sugar into his coffee. "But the fourth one is quite interesting. The numbers are latitude 51 degrees 30 minutes, longitude 1 degree 17 minutes west. Oddly enough, several bombs were dropped last night at this exact location. They blew the hell out of a dairy farmer's field and barns, killed seven head of cattle."

"The location was a mistake?"

"A typographical error," Rathbone confirmed. "The RAF base is some miles farther west, at 27 minutes rather than 17."

"Whose error was it? The spy's?"

"Actually it was our error." Rathbone picked up the copy of the top-secret list they'd been studying. It was headed: *Alphabetical List and Key to Locations of RAF Stations, etc., Shown on SD239*. Beneath the heading were four subheads: RAF Airfields, Latitude, Longitude, and Map Reference.

"What do you mean?" Penrose asked.

"A typographical error which we caught and corrected at the printing office." Rathbone raised his eyebrows at the other man. "Corrected in all copies but this one, Major Penrose."

Penrose actually laughed. "You insist there's a Nazi spy in these War Rooms. I told you we're quite secure, I handle it myself."

"Perhaps. I hope so, for your sake." Rathbone finished his coffee and stood up to leave. "This is to be kept strictly confidential, of course. You'll hear from me again shortly."

Major Penrose saw him to the door, and as he left Rathbone smiled at the WAAF. "Could you tell me the way to Colonel Cutler's office?"

"Straight down the corridor, sir."

"Thank you."

Colonel Cutler was huddled with Air Vice-Marshal Maynard in the mess when Rathbone finally tracked him down. Both were fairly young men, about Penrose's age. Maynard still flew some combat

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missions, though he was nearing forty. It was a young man's war, Rathbone thought, as they always were.

He sat. "I've been in to see Penrose," he told Cutler. "There's a situation you'll need to be briefed on when you're free."

Cutler glanced at his watch. "Can it wait until tomorrow? It's almost sundown and the Krauts will be coming over soon."

Colonel Rathbone nodded. "Tomorrow." He picked up a biscuit as he got to his feet, said his goodbyes, and left. He passed the closely guarded entrance to the War Rooms and went up the steps to the street level of Whitehall, past more guards. Rounding a barricade of sandbags, he had a perfect view of the blazing sun low in the afternoon sky. It would be a clear night, perfect for flying.

He headed down the street to where his staff car and driver waited and had almost reached it when the first sharp pain hit him.

Rand had never heard of Colonel Rathbone before the day forty-eight years later when Hastings summoned him to the offices of Concealed Communications. "Here's the perfect job for a retired department head like yourself," he told Rand. "This World War II material was recently declassified by the government and there are some interesting items here."

"You expect me to plow through all of that?" Rand asked, aghast.

"Only the material about Niles Rathbone. Ever hear of him?"

"Never."

"He was one of our top M.I.5 people during the first year of the war. He died in November of nineteen forty, apparently of a heart attack. These newly declassified papers show that he was actually poisoned."

"Poisoned! Why would they keep such a thing secret all these years?"

"For a very important reason. He died shortly after leaving a meeting at the underground War Rooms in Whitehall. It was presumed that he was poisoned by one of the officers on duty there—one of Churchill's inner circle."

"What possible motive could they have had?"

Hastings leaned back and lit his pipe. "It seems Colonel Rathbone thought one of them was a traitor in the pay of the Nazis. The locations of several RAF bases were pinpointed for German bombers, and the information could only have come from someone in the War Rooms."

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Rand was beginning to understand. "They couldn't make this public until they knew the identity of the traitor."

"Exactly. After Rathbone's death, the investigation came to a dead end. No further evidence was uncovered and the idea of a spy or traitor in the War Rooms was dismissed. The records were classified to prevent the spread of unfounded rumors. You can imagine the damage such rumors might have had at the height of the Battle of Britain."

"But this is nearly a half century later."

Hastings shrugged. "I suppose it was simply forgotten. But now that the records have been declassified, we'd like to get to the bottom of it. I thought of you at once. It's your sort of assignment, and without the least bit of danger. Most people connected with the War Rooms have been dead for years."

Rand stepped into the brisk October air carrying a large box of declassified wartime documents. He vaguely resented Hastings saying the job lacked danger. It was the sort of comment one made to an elderly employee no longer able to face the risks of a job. Rand was far from elderly, though he'd been retired from Double-C for more than a decade and was past his sixtieth birthday.

He took the train to Reading and drove home, surprised to find his wife Leila already back from her teaching day at the University. "Examinations this week," she reminded him. "I thought I'd use the time to rake up some of the leaves. What's in the box?"

"Hastings thought I'd like to look through some declassified files on a World War II case."

"He's getting you into it again, isn't he?"

"He assured me it wasn't dangerous," Rand grumbled.

He spent the rest of the week reading through the files, often finding himself sidetracked by some interesting bit of information. The intelligence and code-breaking unit at Bletchley Park, known to him only through legend, came alive in these documents. He read about the Guy Fawkes bombing, and about the coded message Bletchley Hall had cracked too late to counter the raids on the RAF bases. He read some of Colonel Rathbone's own notes, made the day he died, including his plan to question a Major Penrose who was in charge of the War Rooms security.

By the weekend, Rand was as convinced as Rathbone had been. Someone in the Cabinet War Rooms had used the locations in a top-secret list to pinpoint targets for the Luftwaffe.

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It had been forty-eight years ago almost to the day, he realized, remembering that Guy Fawkes Day was due again the following Saturday. Hastings was probably right. Anyone with the rank to serve in the War Rooms would probably be dead by now—if one of them *had* poisoned Colonel Rathbone, it was too far in the past to do anything about it. Still, he felt he owed something to this man he'd never known. He owed Niles Rathbone a few more days of his time, at the very least. He would take the morning train back into London on Monday.

They had it all on computers now. Rand merely asked for a complete list of officers assigned to the War Rooms in November 1940 and it came up on the screen before his eyes. As an afterthought he asked for civilians as well, and the computer responded, leading off with CHURCHILL, WINSTON S., PRIME MINISTER.

The bored-looking civil servant who operated the machine shrugged. "That's it. Enlisted personnel would have been on temporary duty and they're not listed."

"Can you tell me if any of these are still alive?"

"From November nineteen forty? There may be one or two."

The computer listed three:

CUTLER, COLONEL MARCUS J.
MAYNARD, AIR VICE-MARSHAL JAMES L.
PENROSE, MAJOR HUGH B.

"You're in luck," the man told Rand. "There are three, and they all have the same address if you want to visit them."

"The same address?"

"Waverly. It's a retirement home in the north for former military officers. A great many World War II people are there."

"How far north?"

"Near York." He gave Rand a printout of the names and the address.

That evening Rand told Leila he'd be going up to York at the end of the week. "There are some people I want to see. Some old soldiers."

He spent the next few days at home learning what he could about the three survivors. On Thursday he returned to London and visited the Cabinet War Rooms, which had recently been opened as an adjunct of the Imperial War Museum. He imagined Whitehall looking much as it had been in 1940 as he descended the steps and paid his admission.

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The purpose of the underground rooms had been to protect Churchill, his cabinet and chiefs of staff during any possible bombing of London by the Germans. The complex, ten feet underground, had been completed a week before war was declared in 1939 and was used during the Battle of Britain and the later German rocket attacks on the city. Rand walked down the long corridor beneath the reinforced concrete ceiling, looking in at the little rooms where the heads of government had worked and slept. The Cabinet Room itself was arranged exactly as it had been at 5:00 P.M. on 15 October 1940, at the height of the bombings.

In one of the glass display cases hanging on the wall, Rand found the top-secret list of RAF stations that had been the basis for Colonel Rathbone's deductions about a traitor in the War Rooms. Now it was only a historical memento. Forty-eight years ago it had cost countless lives.

He paused to study the office accommodations for the secretaries and typists, the facilities for making tea and coffee, the beds in a number of the offices. The map room and its annex held special fascination for him, as did the Prime Minister's office, with the bed in which Churchill had slept. Most of the officers assigned here had been generals or commanders, although a number of lesser ranks down to Captain had served as support personnel at one time or another. Several civilians, male and female, had worked as private secretaries, along with occasional military personnel.

Rand's tour ended at the former mess room, now converted to a shop selling souvenirs and postcards. This was the most likely place for Colonel Rathbone to have been poisoned, but even the original layout of the room was now altered. It told him nothing. As hidden loudspeakers broadcast the sounds of a nighttime bombing of London, he went upstairs to the street level.

It was doubtful that the three remaining officers would know anything of value. Still, he felt he had to see them. Penrose, at least, had been specifically mentioned in Colonel Rathbone's notes. He may have been one of the last persons to see Rathbone alive.

On Friday he took an early train to York and rented a car to drive out to Waverly—a sprawling estate on a small rise of land that commanded a good view of the surrounding countryside. There were individual cottages grouped at the back for those former officers able to care for themselves, and Rand headed there first. A few of the men were gathering sticks and limbs from the nearby woods, piling

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them in a heap between the cottages and the main house. "What's all this?" Rand asked one grey-haired man. "Clean-up day?"

"It's for the Guy Fawkes bonfire tomorrow night."

Rand nodded. "Ah. I'd forgotten." He glanced toward the cottages. "Perhaps you can help me. I'm looking for Colonel Marcus Cutler."

"Old Cutler's in the main house now. After his wife died, it was too much for him out here alone. He's in the infirmary."

Rand thanked the man and went to the main house, deciding it was best to track down each of the three in turn. A pleasant nurse took him in charge. "Are you a relative of the colonel's or a friend?"

"Neither one, really. I'm engaged in a research project dealing with the Battle of Britain."

"I don't know how much help the colonel will be. He doesn't talk much about those days."

Marcus Cutler was a stooped old man in his eighties who supported himself shakily on canes. He peered at Rand through his glasses as if trying to remember who he was. "You don't know me," Rand quickly assured him. "I came up from London to talk with some of those who were assigned to the Cabinet War Rooms during the bombing."

Cutler motioned to a chair, then lowered himself slowly onto the bed. "I thought for a minute you were my son. He went to America and never came back, not even for his mother's funeral."

"I'm sorry to hear that. My name is Rand. I was in Intelligence work, with Concealed Communications, for a good many years."

"I don't know anything about codes. I worked on maps."

"I'm sure you were very good at it. You must have been, to be assigned to the War Rooms."

The old man shifted his body uncomfortably. "I barely remember those days."

"I was interested in one day in particular. It would have been November sixth, nineteen forty."

Cutler frowned. "The day after Guy Fawkes?"

"That's right."

Encouraged, Rand leaned closer. "Another colonel came to the War Rooms that day—an M.I.5 officer named Rathbone. Do you remember meeting him?"

"Yes. Did you speak with him?"

"Only a few minutes. I remember I was in the mess with another officer having a bite to eat before the bombers came. He wanted to speak with me and said he'd be back the following day. Then he

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went outside and had a heart attack before he reached his car. None of us could believe it."

"Did he eat anything while he was in the mess?"

"I don't remember that."

"The government has declassified the records from that period. An autopsy showed that Colonel Rathbone didn't die of a heart attack. He was poisoned."

"I don't know about that. What are you here for? What do you want?"

His cracking voice had risen alarmingly and the nurse hurried into the room. "What's the trouble here? You really should be lying down, Colonel Cutler." Then, to Rand, "I'm sorry, but you seem to be upsetting him—perhaps you could come back later."

Rand found the next man on the list, Air Vice-Marshal James Maynard, living alone in one of the cottages at the rear of the main house. He seemed younger than his eighty-odd years and still quite vigorous. After Rand explained his mission, Maynard stroked his shock of white hair. "I remember the Guy Fawkes raids," he said. "I was in charge of air operations and the attacks on those bases was a terrible blow to us all. It pointed to a weakness in our security, for one thing."

"And Colonel Rathbone?"

"I remember being introduced to the man. In the mess, I believe. I don't recall anything else about it."

"Did he eat anything?"

"He may have taken a biscuit off the table but I can't really remember. I usually had tea at that time of day and never bothered with the biscuits. People often snitched them in passing. They still do it here."

"Did you know at the time that the information pinpointing the location of the RAF bases came from the War Rooms?"

"Certainly not—I never knew it until this instant! I'd swear everyone who worked there was loyal to the Crown. On what do you base your information?"

"On the fact that Colonel Rathbone was poisoned, apparently while conducting his investigation in the Cabinet War Rooms."

"My God! Why didn't we know about it?"

"The information has been classified until quite recently."

"You're saying we harbored not only a traitor but a murderer as well?"

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"It's a possibility," Rand admitted. "Can you tell me anything, anything at all, about the people you worked with?"

"They were loyal," Maynard said firmly. "Of that much I'm certain."

"Do you have any idea how Colonel Rathbone might have been poisoned?"

"None."

"Well," Rand said, rising to leave, "thank you for your help, anyway, sir. It's been a pleasure chatting with you."

Maynard walked him to the door. "Who else have you come to see? There are others here from those days, you know."

"I've already spoken with Colonel Cutler."

"He talked to you? That surprises me. He usually doesn't like to be reminded of the past. He had a son who was killed in the war."

"He told me he went off to America."

"Sometimes I think he believes that. Who else are you seeing?"

"Major Penrose."

Maynard looked thoughtful for a moment. "Yes, of course you'd be seeing Penrose. *He* was there, all right."

"Is there anything special I should ask him?"

"You might ask why he never rose above the rank of Major."

The nurse with the pleasant face had some bad news for Rand. "I'm afraid Major Penrose is out of sorts today. He's eighty-eight years old, you know, and not too well. I believe he's been sleeping all day. His daughter is with him now."

"Perhaps I could speak with her."

She smiled. "Let me see."

Presently a woman in her late sixties came into the waiting room with the nurse. "I'm Gwen Penrose. Gwen Penrose Forsyth, actually. Nurse said you wanted to see my father or me." She had been pretty once, Rand could see, and she carried herself with dignity.

"It's really your father I came to see. May we sit and talk?"

"Just for a moment. I don't want to leave him alone. He's beginning to wake up." She followed Rand to a sofa near the door.

"I was hoping to speak with him about his war experiences," Rand said as they sat.

"Did you serve under him? —But no, you're much too young for that."

"Only by a few years. I got into Intelligence work shortly after

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the war. Now I'm trying to piece together what happened in the Cabinet War Rooms during the Battle of Britain."

She nodded. "That was a terrible time. We could hear the bombers going over, bound for London. I was still a teenager."

"Do you know what your father did at the War Rooms?"

She nodded. "I helped him out for a few months when I was nineteen—during the rocket attacks late in the war. I don't know how they could work down there without ever seeing daylight. It drove me wild. Of course, during the Battle of Britain most of the attacks came at night. People were safe on the streets during the daylight hours. But you asked what my father did. He was the so-called Camp Commandant, responsible for security, domestic arrangements, and the day-to-day operation of the War Rooms."

Rand nodded, understanding now why Colonel Rathbone would come to a junior officer with his evidence. "Did you ever hear him mention an officer named Rathbone?"

"No, I don't believe so." She looked toward her father's room and got to her feet. "I really must be getting back."

"Let me come with you to see if he's awake."

"All right."

He followed her as far as the door and watched while she bent over the pale sleeping man. "His breathing's better," she whispered. "Perhaps you could see him tomorrow."

Rand had planned on catching an evening train back to London, but he was anxious to interview Penrose if it was at all possible. "I'll be back in the morning," he said.

He found a room for the night and phoned Leila to tell her he was staying over.

Saturday was a sunny day with unseasonably warm temperatures for this far north. Rand drove to Waverly in the late morning, after a leisurely breakfast. It wasn't until he spotted the large pile of brush for the bonfire that he remembered it was Guy Fawkes Day. Forty-eight years to the day since German bombers had flown their vapor trails across the Channel to hit six RAF bases and a farmer's barn.

The nurse greeted him in the reception area. "Major Penrose is much better this morning," she informed him with a smile. "You'll be able to visit him."

He found Penrose propped up in bed, awaiting his lunch. "My daughter told me you were here yesterday," the old man said. His

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voice had a certain vigor, and some color had returned to his wrinkled face. "What can I do for you?"

"I don't want to bother you if you're not feeling well—"

"Nonsense—I feel better than I did ten years ago. I just have a little trouble getting around. These old legs refuse to move."

"Your daughter tells me you were in charge of the Cabinet War Rooms."

"More or less. We had civilians helping with the management from time to time, but those were mainly housekeeping duties." He smiled. "I didn't order the Prime Minister about or anything like that."

"Security was one of your concerns?"

"In a sense. I made sure things were locked up when not in use."

"An Intelligence colonel named Rathbone came to visit you in nineteen forty."

"Ah, yes—Rathbone. I was questioned at the time, you know, but nothing ever came of the investigation."

"He believed there was a security leak in the War Rooms."

"If there was, it was never repeated. The incident with the airfields was the only time."

The nurse arrived with his tray of food. "Here you are, sir. Nice and hot. I can never remember—are you tea or coffee?"

"Coffee, please. I like it black."

She poured coffee from a Silex. "Just ring me when you're finished and I'll remove the tray."

When they were alone again, Rand said, "I've spoken to Cutler and Maynard."

"Have you? I've never been too friendly with them."

"You were older than both men, yet you remained a major. Was there any reason for that?" Rand tried to sound casual, inoffensive.

"The promotions went to officers with combat experience. I fought in the trenches at the end of the First War, but I didn't stay in uniform. I came home and married a wonderful girl. Gwen was born in 'twenty-one and our son Ralph in 'twenty-three. I was in the insurance business until the Second War seemed near, then I went back into the Army. They didn't want me for a combat post—I'd been an office manager at my firm and they felt I was better off in a management position in London. I was given a commission and promoted to major quickly enough, but that was as high as I ever went. Perhaps they put something in my file after that RAF business. I never tried to find out."

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"Colonel Rathbone was poisoned the day he visited the War Rooms. Did you know that?"

The old man pushed the half finished tray of food aside. "I suspected it from the questions they asked, but nobody ever said it. They questioned me more than the others because he'd come to see me."

"Did he eat anything while he was with you?"

Major Penrose shook his head. "Nothing. We had a cup of coffee, that was all. And we both drank from the same pot, so it had to be all right."

"He spoke to you about the list of RAF bases?"

"Yes. He was convinced the information transmitted to the Germans came from us because of a typographical error in only our copy."

Rand nodded. "Yes, I read about that in Rathbone's notes. Everything is declassified now, you know."

There was a tapping on the half open door and Gwen Penrose came in, carrying a gift-wrapped basket of fruit. "Hello, Daddy. The Women's Auxiliary wants you to have this fruit basket. They said to tell you it was a Guy Fawkes gift. Hello, Mr. Rand. It's good to see you again."

Penrose looked distastefully at the fruit. "Not much there I can eat, but the nurses will be pleased to have it."

"You've had your lunch already. Is that all you ate?"

"It was enough. Mr. Rand and I were talking."

"They're getting ready for the bonfire tonight. Some of the men are making a Guy Fawkes dummy to burn on it."

"I'd like to see that," Penrose said.

"Perhaps we can take you out in the wheelchair." She glanced at Rand. "When will you be going back to London?"

"Soon. I'll leave you two alone while I look around the place. I'll come say goodbye before I catch the train."

He went up to Marcus Cutler's room on the floor above. The retired colonel was seated in a chair by the window. "You're Rand."

"That's right. You have a good memory."

"Memory's better than the eyesight, but I get by."

"I have one more question about that day Colonel Rathbone came to the War Rooms. He said he wanted to speak with you. Do you have any idea what it was about?"

"Maybe my son. Maybe he wanted to tell me how well my son was

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doing in the war. That was before he ran off to America. I never saw him after that."

"Did you ever see Rathbone again?"

"No. Rathbone died."

"You had a list of the RAF bases in the map room, didn't you?"

Cutler nodded.

"Who had access to it?"

"Everyone there. It was top secret, but we'd all been cleared by security."

"There were no copy machines in those days. Someone would have had to write down those locations by hand if they wanted to copy them. Wouldn't that have been noticed?"

"Not necessarily. The list was in a binder with a leather cover marked *Top Secret*. Someone could have slipped it out and taken it without anyone knowing it was gone."

Rand glanced at the dresser, where some framed family photographs stood. One was of some uniformed men and women squinting into the sun. He recognized some Whitehall buildings in the background. "Was this taken during the War Room days?"

"Yes, that's right. There I am, in the center. That's James Maynard next to me, and a cute little WAAF named Susan, who was his stenographer. This other chap's dead. A V-2 got him in 'forty-four."

"Major Penrose wasn't in the picture?"

"Penrose was gone by then. They shipped him up to a godforsaken base in Scotland where he couldn't do any harm."

"What sort of harm had he been doing?"

Cutler turned suddenly sullen, as he had the previous day. "Why are you asking all these questions? Who sent you? Did my son send you to spy on me?"

"No, I—"

But Cutler had lapsed into silent gloom.

James Maynard was around back near his cottage, putting the finishing touches on a life-sized Guy Fawkes dummy. "We'll have a blazer tonight, Mr. Rand—we'll light up the sky. Are you staying to see it?"

"I wasn't planning to."

"Stay and eat with me. You can see the bonfire and still catch an evening train back to London. It's dark here by four-thirty and the bonfire's at six."

"All right," Rand agreed.

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He enjoyed a pleasant late-afternoon meal with the old man, and by the time they'd finished it was already dark. Walking back to his cottage from the main dining room, Maynard talked of the war and the people he'd served with. "I asked Penrose about his rank," Rand told him. "He said the promotions went to combat officers."

"Untrue, of course. Penrose was never promoted for the same reason they shipped him out of the War Rooms in 'forty-one. They thought he'd slipped up."

"On the Rathbone affair?"

"Yes. No one ever said it, and no charges were brought, but he was in charge of security and something went wrong. It was his responsibility."

"That's why you and Cutler aren't especially friendly with him?"

"You might say so."

There was a sudden flash of fire in the darkness as a torch was lit. "They're a few minutes early," Rand commented.

"Like children. They can't wait."

"I'll be going now," Rand told him. "Thank you for your help."

"What help was I?"

The huge bonfire burst into flame and there was no need for a response. Rand listened to the cheering as he walked around the fire toward the house. On the terrace near the back door were a number of patients in wheelchairs, and as he drew closer he recognized Gwen Penrose standing behind her father's chair.

"You're still here," she said, surprised to see him.

"I said I'd say goodbye."

It was noisy on the terrace and Penrose told them, "Go down closer so you can see them throw the Guy on the fire."

"All right," his daughter agreed readily. When she and Rand were some distance away, she confided, "These old Army men use Guy Fawkes as an excuse to imbibe too much. I can't stand their noisy bragging any more. Is that a sign I'm growing old, Mr. Rand?"

"Not at all. It's a normal reaction."

There was a great roar from the spectators as two men appeared carrying the stuffed effigy of Guy Fawkes. "Why did you come here?" she asked suddenly. "Are you trying to make trouble for my father?"

"No."

"Hasn't he been through enough already?"

"I don't know. What has he been through?"

"I know they always suspected him, that Colonel Rathbone suspected him and that others have since."

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"That was all nearly fifty years ago," Rand reminded her.

The Guy went twisting, turning into the flames, igniting with a new burst of fire as the loudest cheer of all split the night air.

"Tell me one thing, Mr. Rand. Do you think my father betrayed his country and murdered Colonel Rathbone?"

"No," Rand answered quietly, feeling very old, feeling a bit of a chill even this close to the fire. "No, I think you did, Mrs. Forsyth."

It seemed like forever before she answered. "I was only a teenager at the time—you seem to have forgotten that."

"You told me you helped your father at the War Rooms for a few months when you were nineteen. You placed this at the time of the German rocket attacks in nineteen forty-four, but your father said you were born in nineteen twenty-one, so you would have been nineteen in nineteen forty, not nineteen forty-four—and both Cutler and Maynard said your father was transferred out of the War Rooms soon after the Rathbone business. Maynard specifically dated it as nineteen forty-one. If you helped him out for a few months while he was there, it must have been during nineteen forty. Cutler showed me a photograph of a group that included Maynard's WAAF stenographer. I imagine you were a WAAF, too, assigned to the War Rooms and working as your father's secretary. He told me he shared a pot of coffee with Colonel Rathbone that day. In the traditional manner, the coffee would have been made and brought into the office by you. Your father assured me it couldn't have been poisoned because both he and Rathbone drank it, but most people take sugar in their coffee and Rathbone probably did. Your father drinks his black to this day, I noticed at lunch. No one would know that fact better than a secretary who also happened to be his daughter. Some white powder mixed with the sugar would go unnoticed, and Rathbone would die while your father was unhurt. Naturally you disposed of the remaining sugar later."

"You're very good at surmises."

"You lied about when you worked there. Why, unless you had something to hide? You had the opportunity to copy the list of RAF base locations, and you had the motive and opportunity to poison Colonel Rathbone. I think you did both of those things."

She stared at the brightly burning fire for some time. "I'll tell you a story, Mr. Rand," she said at last. "I don't expect you to believe it, but it happens to be true.

"I enlisted in the WAAF when I was nineteen, and my father

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requested that I be assigned to the War Rooms to help him. You've guessed that much correctly. I was going with a young man at the time—the son of a French diplomat. We were very passionate for each other and I became pregnant in the late summer of nineteen forty. By October I was desperate. I couldn't tell my mother or my father, and pregnancy would mean my dismissal from the WAAF. Eric said he couldn't marry me, but he promised to arrange for a safe abortion if I would do one thing for him. He said his father needed the locations of the RAF bases in the South of England. I foolishly agreed to copy it for him. I knew it was wrong, but Free France was still our ally and to me it seemed only a technical crime. I couldn't believe it when I overheard Colonel Rathbone telling my father about the Guy Fawkes bombing of the bases. Worse than that, he seemed to be accusing my father of a breach of security."

"So you killed him."

"You have to believe this. It was a terrible, terrible accident. The poison wasn't meant for him."

"Who was it meant for?"

She took a deep breath. "Me."

"You'd better explain that."

"I had expected Eric to give me money for an abortion. Instead he presented me with a vial of white powder. He said it would make me ill and induce a miscarriage. He told me that was the safest way. I hadn't used it yet on the sixth of November. I suppose I was trying to work up my courage. When I heard Colonel Rathbone questioning my father, I knew I had to do something quickly. Either my father would be accused or the truth would come out about my part in it. I couldn't allow either to happen. I took the vial from my purse and mixed the white powder with the sugar. I figured it would make the colonel ill and delay the investigation—even a day's respite would give me time to think. I never imagined the powder would kill him. In fact, it was a full day before the terrible truth dawned on me—Eric had meant it to kill me!"

"What happened after that?"

"There was an intense investigation of my father, but nothing could be proven. The poisoning was hushed up, as you know, and he was simply transferred out of the War Rooms to a base in Scotland. I left when he did, reassigned to one of the very RAF bases the Germans had bombed. I think that was my worst punishment of all."

"The baby?"

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"The tension was too much for me. I had a natural miscarriage before Christmas and no one ever knew."

"What about your friend Eric?"

"I never saw him again. He disappeared after Guy Fawkes Day. Someone told me he'd been killed in one of the London bombings, but I never knew it for sure. I think I spent the next ten years fearful he might turn up again any day, but he never did. Finally I married a businessman here in York." She turned to search his face with her eyes. "Do you believe me?"

"Yes," Rand said.

"Will you tell my father? The police?"

"I won't tell anyone. What good would it do?"

"Thank you." She sighed. "I must be getting back to him now."

He watched her walk up the path to the terrace where the old man in the wheelchair waited, then he went out to his car and drove away. In the rearview mirror the dying flames of the bonfire looked like a city burning.

ON OUR COVER

Patrick O'Neal was born and raised in Ocala, Florida, and studied acting at the Neighborhood Playhouse and the Actors' Studio. He is involved in the operation of four popular restaurants in New York and one in Beverly Hills. On Broadway, he played feature roles in *Oh, Men! Oh, Women!, The Ginger Man,* and *The Night of the Iguana,* and he has appeared in approximately 300 television shows, hosted the lost-episodes *Twilight Zone* special, was host and narrator of the *War Chronicles,* and is currently featured in the Maigret mini-series starring Richard Harris.

His film credits include *From the Terrace, Castle Keep, The Way We Were, The Stepford Wives,* and *The Kremlin Letter.* He recently completed *Like Father, Like Son* with Dudley Moore. Lately he has been directing films and co-wrote the screenplay of the first, *Oberndorf Revisited,* based on a story by Irwin Shaw. Another, *Wilson's Reward,* based on a story by W. Somerset Maugham, won the Houston Film Festival's Grand Jury Award.

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Morrow's resentment came from the nondescript car's apparent overfamiliarity. He would ignore it this time, he thought, but if it showed up again he would give it the key across the door-paint . . .

THE GREY CAR

by J. W. WHITEHEAD

Morrow first noticed the grey car one evening on returning home from work. He was so tired he probably would have missed the car had it not been parked so that its rear bumper hung over his driveway. The car was perfectly nondescript—grey, mid-size, boxlike, no dents, no cancer, a regular-issue license plate. When he checked closer, the seats were clean, the carpet dark and spotless. The inspection sticker didn't expire for over two months. The radiator grille looked like bared teeth. It made him resent all the more having had to pass his driveway and back his car up the drive from another angle.

The street on which Morrow lived was tree-lined and narrow. It was a two-way street, but it became in effect one-way whenever a car chose to travel on it. Both curbs were lined with cars. Many of the houses were split-level, with two tenants to a house. This made for a good number of cars, and Morrow understood that everyone needed to park his car somewhere. His resentment came from the nondescript car's apparent overfamiliarity. He would ignore it this time, he thought, but if it showed up again he would give it the key across the door-paint.

Inside, his wife greeted him by brushing her hair lightly across his cheek and kissing the air. She greeted people who attended their parties the same way.

"How was work?" she said.

"The same," said Morrow. "Do we have a new neighbor?"

She glanced up from her mixing bowl, where she seemed to be stirring Hamburger Helper. "No," she said. "Why do you ask?"

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"I was wondering about that grey car that's parked in our driveway."

"In our driveway?" she said. She rested the bowl on her abdomen and shuffled over to the window.

"Over our driveway," he said.

"Wasn't 'in our driveway' a little overdramatic?"

"I corrected it," he said. "Do you know who it is?"

"Whose car it is?"

"Of course."

"No," she said. "It's a visitor. Someone has a visitor."

"Well, they damn well better not park over my driveway again," he said, "or I'll give them the key across the door-paint." He held a key between the knuckles of his first two fingers, menacingly like a knife.

"My father used to use an icepick," she said. Her eyes got a glossy look, as though they were receding into her head.

"To scrape paint?" he said.

"Not the paint," she said. "The tires. The driver's side in front, to add the weight of the engine and make the guy change it out in the street."

"Oh, that's lovely."

"It worked."

"Do you know you have a different standard for your dad?"

"Yes," she said.

Morrow retired to the den to watch *Wheel of Fortune*. His wife asked if he wanted to eat on television trays or in the dining room.

"Whatever," he said.

At ten, when he could no longer bear the television and was on his way to the medicine cabinet for an Alka Seltzer, he chanced to look out the bathroom window and saw that the grey car was still there. As he waited for the tablets to dissolve, he stared at the car, silently commanding it to move. His wife looked in at him. He saw her reflection in the window. "What are you doing?" she said.

"That car is still there."

She came and looked. "I've seen that car before. It's been around before."

"If he's still there tomorrow morning he'll wish he hadn't been."

"Big words." She giggled.

"Been hitting the wine rack again, dear?" he said.

"Care to join me?"

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He thought he would. Wine made them tired, but not sleepy. It was their understood code for a wild night.

He followed her downstairs. In the kitchen, he got the new bottle while she got the glasses. "Where's the corkscrew?" he said.

"Here," she said. She held it up, but didn't bring it to him. He went and got it.

His wife was sleeping lightly on his chest and he was fading into the hazy, slightly damp world just before sleep when he heard, distantly, the turnover of a car's engine. The car sputtered and went silent, then started again. This time it hummed, coughed, and faded up the street and away.

Morrow lay without moving in the darkness for a long time. The clock moved and continued to hum. His eyes wouldn't close. He began to hear other sounds, and doubted if he heard them. He wasn't sure eventually if he'd heard anything at all.

When he slid out from under his wife's limbs, she muttered something. He went to the bathroom and looked out the window at his driveway. The car had moved—it was now barricading the entire driveway.

Morrow wrote a note, firm and aggressive, put on a bathrobe and slippers, and put the note under the passenger's-side windshield wiper. The note said: "Do not park here again unless you are not especially concerned about your car." When he came inside, he finished an open bottle of wine while he watched the end of a late movie and finally lay in bed, listening to what came to nothing.

The car was gone in the morning. About this he felt pleased. His wife asked him how he had slept. He recognized that his answer was very important to the general peace and said, "Fine."

Later, when he pulled out of the driveway, he looked to see if the grey car had simply moved to an open spot elsewhere. It hadn't. At lunch, and again at three in the afternoon, he called his wife to ask if the car had returned. She assured him the driveway was clear.

Morrow entered his quiet, car-lined street at just after six. The grey car was parked along the curb by his house, its front, with the gritted teeth of the radiator grille, sniffing at the edge of his driveway. His note was no longer under the passenger's-side windshield wiper.

It seemed to him that he might not have written the note at all. He could recall it: Don't park here again unless you don't care what

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happens to your car. He could recall putting on his robe and shoes. He knew that earlier in the night he had made love to his wife. He didn't recall anything specifically of that. Looking at the car, he had difficulty remembering what in fact had happened and what hadn't.

His wife greeted him at the door with a brush of her hair and the sound of a kiss.

Morrow said, "It's back." He poured himself some wine. "Did you see who it was?"

"Of course not. Do you think I can just sit around all day and watch cars park on the street?"

"Someone new must have moved in. They're going to have to learn that they can't start bothering me. I won't put up with it."

"Why don't you use the icepick?"

"Do you remember me getting up and putting on my robe last night?"

"No. I was asleep."

"I went and checked the driveway. That wreck was parked right across our entrance. I wrote a note and put it on the windshield."

"That car is not a wreck. It's a nicer car than my car."

"How can you say that?" He looked out the window at the car. He couldn't remember what it looked like. "That car is like a lukewarm drizzle. It's too average to mention."

"Well, you can think that, it's a free country. My main point was that you were asleep before I was."

"No, I wasn't."

"Yes, you were. I put my head on your chest to sleep because I knew you wouldn't mind. You wouldn't even notice."

He retired to the den to watch the evening news. His wife came in and sat down. "Dinner will be a little late," she said. "I got home a little late from food shopping."

That night, after an evening's television, his eyes sore from the steady light of the set, Morrow got ready for bed and checked on the grey car. It was gone. He walked outside and glanced up and down the street. There was no sign of it. The space it had taken was empty. He went inside for his car keys, backed his car out of the driveway, and pulled it into the open street space. His car was shorter than the grey one—the rear end hunched courteously away from the entrance.

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When he got back inside, his wife said, "What were you doing out there?"

"I took the open spot. In case I dreamed that note I put on his car, I wanted him to get the message."

"I still like the icepick."

"If I used an icepick, the car couldn't move."

Morrow dreamed of a house in the country—his house, he had no complaints with his house—where he had to get into his car and drive five minutes down a thin road to reach his next-door neighbor, who would do anything for Morrow as Morrow would do anything for him, neither of them ever asked for help. In the morning, he felt rested. It was Saturday. He intended to lounge around the house, saving up rest hours like dividends to be collected.

His wife called him for breakfast. He came into the kitchen to squeeze orange juice and, glancing out the window, saw the grey car parked in the driveway, its grimacing front end nearly against his wife's bumper.

"Look at that!" he said. He grabbed her arm, pulled her over to the window, and pointed at the driveway. "Look at that!" he repeated.

"How am I going to get out?" she said.

"You can't."

"Call the police."

"No," he said. "I'm going to wait and talk to him."

"He's not going to listen. He didn't last night."

"Last night when?"

"When you heard him drive up and park across the driveway and we ran down to catch him."

"We did?"

"Yes. And you told him to move the car and never park in our driveway again. He was a young guy with long hair and a moustache. You don't remember this, do you?"

Morrow thought it all sounded vaguely familiar. He could imagine it happening. Yet that wasn't how he imagined the driver. He imagined a fat, fortyish bigot with a receding hairline. "Kind of," he said. "I kind of remember."

"Do you remember he muttered something and got in his car and took off? I was so impressed with how you handled it and we went to bed with the lights on. Do you remember that?"

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Morrow couldn't say so for sure, but he knew the answer he'd better give and gave it. "Yes," he said, "I remember that."

"But you see how much he listened," she said. "I still say we call the police. We didn't scrape his paint or icepick his tire."

"So did you like last night?" he said. "Did you like the lights on?"

"Of course I did. You must have asked me that fifty times last night."

Morrow found himself wishing he could remember. He no longer had time for resentment—he truly wished he could remember. He wrote a new note, put on a sweatsuit and track shoes, went to the grey car, and stuck the new note under the driver's-side windshield wiper. The note said: "My wife loves your car. I will trade it to you for one of my own, both of which are more expensive and in excellent condition. Inquire within."

That afternoon, he sat dozing in his favorite easy chair, half watching a college football game. His wife was at the hairdresser's. She had borrowed his car because hers was still closed in by the grey car. By the time she got home, the afternoon's shadows had lengthened and the light had turned orange. Her hair looked like a stranger's, but a beautiful stranger's. She stood in the doorway of the den, looking at him. "Is the car still there?" he said.

"Forget the car."

"Come over here," he said.

"You come over here."

So he turned off the television and he did. As he kissed her, he waited for something. He wanted something to show him if he should believe this or not, so he could remember it. He realized he would have to pay attention all the time, so he wouldn't miss anything. He felt he'd probably missed enough already, even if he couldn't remember for sure.

Later, in the early darkness of their bed, Morrow heard his wife's voice beside him, talking about what they could have for dinner and how the hairdresser's had been and how they might get rid of the grey car.

"I offered to buy it," he said. "I put a note on the car."

She laughed with delight. As she chattered, he found he couldn't keep his eyes open. He lay in the swirling mist of warmth and darkness, listening, trying to concentrate.

"You've been asleep," she said, shaking him. "Do you hear it?"

"Hear what?" he said, but he heard it. It was the sound of a car

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warming up. They got out of bed and went to the bathroom window. There were two forms in the front seat of the grey car. Morrow threw on his bathrobe and ran down the stairs, through the kitchen, and out to the driveway. He could hear his wife behind him.

"Hold it!" he called to the grey car. "Wait!"

The car did not respond. It began slowly to roll down the incline of the driveway. Morrow ran after it. He wasn't sure what he would do, but he didn't know when he would have another opportunity to talk to the driver of the grey car. He flung himself on the trunk of the car and clasped the sides. His wife screamed. He was about to tell her he was all right, that everything was all right, but then the car pulled away and he had to put his head down.

They drove through the empty streets of the neighborhood, past houses and cars and driveways he had never really seen before. As he clung to the back of the car, he became convinced that nothing so real had happened to him in years. He raised his head and saw, at the wheel, a fat man with thinning hair and, in the passenger seat, a young man with long brown hair and a moustache. Morrow caught the young man's eye. "Stop the car!" he said. "I'm sorry, just stop the car!" There was no resentment left. He was far too busy just trying to stay in one piece.

Morrow watched the young man talking to the older man, watched them gesturing back toward him, met the driver's eyes in the rear-view mirror. "Let me off!" he yelled over the wind. "I'm sorry!"

The car turned onto another street, blocks from his own but identical to his street, cars lined up at the curbs. The grey car trawled down the street and, almost to the end of the block, whipped expertly into a space adjacent to a driveway. The house to which the driveway belonged was dark except for one grey-blue window flickering with television light. Morrow pulled his robe tightly around him, walked to the curb, sat down on the grass. The two men were already out of the car and walking away.

"Hey!" he called after them. "Are you just going to leave it here?"

"You want it back where it was?"

He wasn't sure which one had said it. "No," he said, "of course not." Just then the front door of the house opened and a man in a bathrobe and slippers came down the walk. Morrow watched as the two men walked to the corner and turned right. The man from the house stood over him.

"What are you doing there?" he said.

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Morrow looked up and noticed an expensive haircut, horn-rimmed glasses, a trim shape. "I'm resting," he said.

"Is this your car?"

"No."

"It's not?"

"No."

"Then whose is it?"

"I don't know."

"People have to learn," said the man, "they can't park across my driveway and expect to get away with it."

A woman appeared in the doorway. "Arthur," she said, "what are you doing out there?"

"Nothing, dear," he said. "Go back inside."

"Don't worry about the car, Arthur," she said. "It's not hurting us."

"Go back inside, dear."

Morrow found it all vaguely familiar. He recognized the blades of grass he picked, one by one, from the lawn. He recognized how they felt on his fingers, how firm they were.

"So this really isn't your car?" said the man. The woman at the door turned away and went inside.

"No."

"Then you won't mind if I do this." He produced an icepick from the pocket of his robe and plunged it into the sidewall of the nearest tire. The tire gave out with a lazy pop. Morrow watched him intently.

"It really isn't your car, is it?" the man asked.

"It almost was," said Morrow. "Do you mind if I sit here and rest for another minute or two? If you'd rather I didn't, I can move."

"Suit yourself," said the man. "Just don't rip up all the grass." He turned and walked inside.

Morrow sat, feeling the damp cold under his robe. When he was ready, when he was certain he could do it and do it well, he would walk home, eat dinner with his wife, and they would go to bed.

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a *NEW* Jonas Pickett story by

MICHAEL GILBERT

Sam said, "That was what they was saying at the pub. They're nothing but a crowd of no-good dropouts and the Council would turn 'em out neck and crop if they tried the same game round here."

"Then I'm afraid, Sam," said Claire, "that your worthy friends in the saloon bar of the Fisherman's Arms are, as usual, talking nonsense."

The tone in which she said this made Jonas look up at her. He said, "Have you got some information that we haven't?"

"You can call them dropouts if you like. They are people who have got tired of an insanitary, overcrowded life in our inner cities and find a gypsy life healthier and happier."

This is the powerful final story in Michael Gilbert's series about Jonas Pickett, Solicitor and Commissioner for Oaths at the prosperous seaside resort of Shackleton. All nine stories in the series have appeared in EQMM, the first, "Anything for a Quiet Life," in the September 1983 issue. A collection of the stories is due for publication in the U.K. next year. In the U.S. this year, *we have the pleasure of a Harper & Row collection of Mr. Gilbert's Patrick Petrella stories,* The Young Petrella.

To read anything by Michael Gilbert is to enjoy a simple and precise beauty of prose, a gratifying non-begging of difficult questions, and a look into the kind of practical mind Penelope Mortimer described in one of her novels as "like ice over troubled waters . . . "

"Q"

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THE FREEDOM FOLK

by MICHAEL GILBERT

In the four years they had been established in Shackleton, the lunching arrangements of Jonas Pickett, solicitor, and his staff had become, like many other things, a matter of habit. His partner, Sabrina Mountjoy, took hers at the Central Cafe, with others of her sex and totem; more talking was done than eating. Jonas went to the Conservative Club and usually managed to get in a rubber of bridge before going back to the office. Jonas's secretary, Claire, brought sandwiches and liked, weather permitting, to eat them in the open. So far she had been lucky.

It had been an exceptionally mild spring. March was half over and sunny day had followed sunny day with the wind blowing steadily from the southwest. Her favorite lunch place was the Dingle. This was where the Shackle stream frothed and bubbled its way out to sea over a bed of white stones.

Indeed, it was a pleasant spot in any weather. The banks of the little valley were gradual on the Shackleton side, more sheer on the far side. The bottom was formed of smooth Southdown turf, through which the stream had cut its bed. On the far side, a flight of steps ran up to the only human habitation in sight. This was the cottage of Francis Delamere, a meteorological hermit, who had roosted up there for nearly half a century, observing the weather of the Channel coast.

He discouraged visitors, but Claire remembered being taken up there once with Jonas, who had acted for the old man in a family matter. He had shown them his vast collection of weather maps, graphs, and statistical records. Claire had found him easy to talk to. He had not laughed at her when she had mentioned the old lost village of Shackleton, which the sea had swallowed so many years ago.

"It's certainly still there," he said. "Divers have walked over it, and fishermen have even maintained that they have been able to

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see it when the tide is low and the water particularly clear. Though that I doubt. Everything that was there must have been sucked into the sand centuries ago."

"And I take it you don't believe the rumor that in times of danger the church bell sounds from under the waves."

She had thought he would laugh, but he looked at her oddly. He said, "Once—it was the night of the terrible storm that cost a dozen lives—at about midnight, when I went out to take a wind reading, I could have sworn I heard a church bell. Somewhere out there." He pointed to the waters of the Channel, deceptively calm under the blue sky. "Imagination, of course."

As she was thinking about him, she caught sight of a figure moving on the knoll between the cottage and the cliff edge. Certainly not Delamere. Now that her attention had been attracted, she made out that someone had set up an easel and was painting. She finished her sandwiches, crossed the rustic bridge over the stream, and climbed the steps to inspect his efforts. Some of the amateur artists who frequented Shackleton in summer disliked being watched at work. Others appreciated an audience.

This seemed to be one of the latter sort. He smiled agreeably as Claire came up and stepped back from the easel.

About forty, Claire guessed. A face tanned by the weather, with wrinkles round the eyes as though he spent much of his time staring into the sun. His short pointed beard, cut in the Vandyke fashion, was beginning to show a sprinkling of grey. He had been painting in oils, using a simple palette. It was a composition of sea and sky, a chiaroscuro of blues and whites and greys. Claire knew little about painting, but enough to find the picture effective and attractive.

She said, "I suppose it wouldn't be for sale, by any chance?"

The man said, "You would have to consult Gus Levy about that."

"Gus—"

"He runs the Frazer Galleries. They handle all my work. You may have heard of them."

This was said gravely, but there was a hint of laughter behind it and Claire realized that she had been stupid. This was not the sort of painter who set up his easel on the Front and sold his pictures to bystanders for a few pounds. She said, "I'm sorry. Yes, I know the Frazer Galleries. They're in Bond Street, aren't they?"

"Correct. If you know them, do I take it you're a Londoner?" He seemed to have abandoned painting for the moment and wanted to talk.

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She said, "I used to work in London, yes. I've become a confirmed Shackletonian now."

"I can't suppose you've retired."

Definitely he was laughing at her, but she was not annoyed. She said, "My employer, Mr. Pickett—he's a solicitor—moved down here from London a few years ago and I came with him."

"Not Jonas Pickett?"

"Correct. You know him?"

"I met him when he acted for me in an unpleasant dispute over the lease of my flat. That was one of the reasons I decided to abandon urban life and bought myself a caravan. A great improvement on a flat in West Kensington, let me tell you."

"As long as the weather stays fine."

"A modern caravan," said the man firmly, "is proof against any vagaries of the climate. I can't imagine why half the populace of our overcrowded, insanitary inner cities don't take to them. They'd be healthier and happier if they did."

"If you can spare the time," said Claire, who found herself liking him more and more, "do please drop in. My name's Rayner, by the way. Claire Rayner. We're at the far corner of Middle Street. I'm sure Jonas would like to see you again."

"I'll do that. And since there's no one here to effect an introduction, I must do it myself. The name is Wroke. Spelled with a 'W'. Philip Wroke."

When, on her return to the office, Claire told Sabrina about this encounter, Sabrina said, "You didn't really offer to buy the picture?"

"Yes. But I saw that I'd made a mistake."

"The last time I attended Open Day at the Academy," said Sabrina thoughtfully, "there were three Wroke seascapes on view. The cheapest, I seem to remember, was priced at three thousand guineas."

"Then," said Claire, "perhaps it's just as well he didn't take me up on my offer."

The faintest preliminary ripples of possible trouble had reached Shackleton that morning. The ladies who were lunching together at the Central Cafe were too engrossed in dissecting the character of the new rector's wife to bother about it, but the stout estate agent who was partnering Jonas at bridge did say, "I hear they had a spot of bother with a nature camp at Portree. Three no trumps."

Jonas was busy trying to analyze this gross overbid and did not

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pursue the matter. So it was the office factotum, Sam Conybeare, who first got the story.

He took his midday cheese and beer at the Fisherman's Arms. He was welcomed by the company in the saloon bar, partly from the dignity of his connection with the law ("Crafty old bastard, that Pickett," was the general view of the company), partly for his Rabelaisian wit, and partly, no doubt, from the consciousness that this ex-fairground boxer and strong man could have slung any one of them out of the door with one hand tied behind his back.

On this occasion, he was making no attempt to hold the floor. He was prepared to drink his beer and listen, for the conversation had taken an interesting turn.

"Heard about it from my cousin over at Poole," said a gnomelike man who mowed the golf-club greens. "Seems they'd nipped in at Portree. Small place, just this side of Walden."

"When you say they nipped in—" this was a tall fisherman "—you mean they didn't ask no one? They was just trespassing?"

"Difficult to talk about trespass when you don't know who the land belongs to."

"All the land belongs to someone," said the landlord.

"I beg to contradict you," said a thin man whose glasses and manner of speaking had earned him the honorary title of Professor, but who, in fact, kept a live-bait store. "The land below high-water mark belongs to no one."

"Surely you're wrong, Professor," said the landlord. "It belongs to the Queen. Like whales."

"Not so. It is *terra sine titulo.*"

Baffled by this display of Latin, the landlord said, "Anyway, no one in their senses is going to pitch a camp where the tide can come up and wash it away. Stands to reason."

"From what I heard," said the gnomelike man, "there isn't a lot of reason in anything these people do. They've got a flag with F.F. on it. Standing, so I understand, for the Freedom Folk, but it could be something different."

A number of alternative suggestions were offered, most of them unprintable. Sam, who had finished his beer, intervened for the first time.

"Diddun I see in the paper," he said, "that Portree had got rid of 'em? How'd they manage that, eh?"

"By force," said the small man. "They're a rough crowd down there. What they did, they turned up one morning early, about a

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hundred of them, slung out the caravans and tents, and pulled down the shacks. Then they ran a fence of barbed wire round the place before anyone could stop them."

"A bit rough," said the landlord. "Wasn't there nothing they could do about it?"

"Well, of course, the man who seems to boss them—Lipitt, or some name like that—he went off to the police. When they arrived, they found them camped out beside the road and a dozen tough characters guarding the way back through the barbed wire what they'd put up. The Inspector said, 'We're not going to have any trouble. The first one who starts a fight, we run him in.' "

"Meaning," said the tall fisherman, "that since they were out, they'd got to stay out."

"The law," agreed the Professor, "favors the status quo."

"So what did they do?" said the landlord.

"What could they do? They couldn't get back without a fight, so they packed up their traps and moved off down the road. At night they pitch camp on the roadside. Provided they move on each day, no one can do anything about that."

Sam said, "How long ago was it they got turned out?"

"It was last week."

"And Walden's what? About thirty miles from here?"

The landlord said, "Don't you worry, Sam. The Council won't have a crowd like that in here, not in a month of Sundays."

Sam said, "Come to that, I don't suppose Portree wanted them neither."

At the next office coffee break, he retailed what he had heard and found an attentive audience.

"I read something about it in the local paper," said Jonas. "Opinion seemed to be divided about the rights and wrongs of it."

"I can't see that it's a question with two sides to it," said Claire. "The people who turned them out were the ones who used force. Surely that put them in the wrong."

"The first wrongdoing," said Sabrina, "was when they camped on someone else's property without permission."

"Apparently it was common land."

"You're using the expression very loosely, darling. If it was what the law calls common land, that only means that the inhabitants had the right to graze their animals on it. It certainly does *not* mean that strangers had a right to come along and live on it."

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"I don't think it was that sort of common. It was a piece by the seashore without a private owner."

"If it was above a median tidemark, it belonged to the community and came under the jurisdiction of the local Council."

Sam said, "That was what they was saying at the pub. They're nothing but a crowd of no-good dropouts and the Council would turn 'em out neck and crop if they tried the same game round here."

"Then I'm afraid, Sam," said Claire, "that your worthy friends in the saloon bar of the Fisherman's Arms are, as usual, talking nonsense."

The tone in which she said this made Jonas look up at her. He said, "Have you got some information that we haven't?"

"You can call them dropouts if you like. They are people who have got tired of an insanitary, overcrowded life in our inner cities—" she found she was quoting the artist "—and find a gypsy life healthier and happier."

"Happier for them," said Sabrina. "What about the people they impose themselves on?"

"There should be room in this country for everyone. Wasn't the government telling us only the other day that the countryside was overfarmed? The mistake people make is thinking about these people as criminals. Some of them are very poor, it's true. They can't even afford a proper tent, let alone a caravan. They just lean two pieces of corrugated iron together—"

"Claire," said Jonas, "you seem to know a lot more about this than we do. Who have you been talking to?"

"As a matter of fact, I happened to meet Philip Wroke in a cafe in the town."

"Don't tell me he's one of them."

"He has been with them now for some months, yes."

"That certainly gives them a touch of respectability."

"Oh, he's not the only one. There are several artists—not as well known as he is, I agree. And writers."

"Poets, no doubt," said Sabrina.

"I don't know about poets, but they've got a radio dramatist. And a pop group. They call themselves the Strollers. They've made quite a few records."

"That was one of the things they told me about," said Sam. "They practice all night. Keep people awake, you see. No thought for others."

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Jonas said, "I should imagine it's difficult to discipline a crowd like that. Have they got a leader?"

"Wroke is regarded as second in command. The leader, the man who founded the group, is called Lipsett."

"And what is *he?*" said Jonas. "An artist, a writer, or a musician?"

"I'm not sure."

"If it's Raymond Lipsett," said Sabrina, "he's a man who writes articles for left-wing publications. I've read quite a few of them. Able stuff, but totally perverted, of course."

"Of course," said Claire sharply. "If his views are left of center, they must be perverted, mustn't they?"

"Children, children," said Jonas. "Don't scratch each other's eyes out." He could see that Claire was losing her temper and that Sabrina would like nothing more than to provoke her. "May I point out that it is now half past eleven and that I, at least, have work to do."

This was true. It was a question of mineral rights at Maggs's Farm which had reached the Crown Court at Brighton. Jonas had decided to brief Counsel and was drafting a case for Mr. Kendrick, Q.C. It was a complex matter and he had to devote his full attention to what he was dictating, but something was niggling him. He knew his secretary as well as any shrewd professional man would be likely to know a girl who has been working for him for nearly six years, but he had never suspected her of holding strong left-wing views.

Perhaps Wroke had something to do with this? To date Claire's relationships with the young of the opposite sex had been casual to the point of flippancy. But a forty-year-old artist— Jonas realized that Claire had been sitting with her pencil poised for some seconds and he wrenched his mind back to the question of the minerals which underlay Farmer Maggs's fields.

At a quarter to seven on the following morning, a matter which had been of remote interest took a sharp step forward. Jonas blinked his eyes open and picked up the telephone from the table beside his bed.

It was the hermit, Francis Delamere, and he was very angry.

He said, "They've come. You've got to do something."

"Do you mind," said Jonas, swinging his legs out of bed and sitting up, "telling me what you're talking about?" He found that he could think more clearly when sitting up, which was as well, because Delamere was almost incoherent with rage.

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"Last night," he said, "after dark. Like thieves in the night!"

"Your house has been burgled."

"No, no. Worse. Much worse. They're all over the Dingle."

There was no need for Jonas to ask who they were. He could guess only too easily. He said, "I suppose you're talking about those campers."

"A rabble. You've got to move them on."

"I'm very sorry about it. But it's not really my job."

"Certainly it's your job. You're my solicitor, aren't you? Start an action."

Jonas's experience had hardened him to clients who demanded actions on every conceivable and some inconceivable points. He said patiently, "Just who would you suggest I start an action against?"

"These people. The F.F."

"The first difficulty is that they're not, as far as I know, a corporate body. And if we could get over that one, what are we starting an action for?"

"Trespass."

"You can't sue them for trespass. You don't own the land."

"You're making difficulties. If the law won't help us, we shall have to take matters into our own hands. Like they did at Portree."

"No," said Jonas. "Whatever you do—" But he found that the telephone had gone dead.

He dressed hastily, thought about breakfast, decided that speed was all important, and got his car out. As he was starting it, Sam appeared and jumped in beside him. The quickest approach to the Dingle was along the Golf Club road. They parked the car in a lay-by and took the track which led down the winding left-hand bank of the stream. As they turned a corner, they came on the scene of the action.

A strong fence, three lines of barbed wire fixed to uprights of angle iron, barred their way. There was a narrow opening through which the track ran. The men standing beside it were clearly both sentinels and guards. Some action was going on in the camp itself. Men and women were crowding round a shanty composed of two corrugated-iron sheets. Jonas said, "Good God! Isn't that Delamere? The stupid old coot. He must have wriggled in under the wire at the top end. What did he think he could do?"

The crowd parted and they could see that two men were carrying the old hermit, who was still struggling.

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"Better get him out, hadn't we?" said Sam. "Before he hurts himself. Or gets hurt."

He marched up to the gate. The guards said, "You can't come in."

"No such word as 'can't' in my vocabulary, chum," said Sam and marched on. The guards took one look at his formidable bulk and decided he was out of their class. Jonas, like a small tender being towed by a battleship, followed in his wake.

At the foot of the path, they met the carrying party coming up.

"Put that man down," said Jonas, "at once."

"Fuck off," said the leading porter. "He tried to pull down our shanty. We're going to pitch him out onto his head."

"Better put him down," said Sam mildly, "or get your own head knocked off. Your choice, mate."

The second porter, who had appreciated Sam's potentiality, had already let go of Delamere's legs. His companion had no choice but to follow suit. Delamere fell onto his knees, stopped there for a few moments, then climbed slowly to his feet. He was clearly dazed and shaken. The crowd who had followed the men were standing round, not actively aggressive, but silent and hostile.

They opened out to let a man through. Jonas felt certain that this was their leader. It would have been easier to judge his age if he had not had so much hair on his face. Two bright-blue eyes stared out from a forest of beard, moustache, and curling side-whiskers. Despite all this foliage, Jonas thought the man was not much past his middle thirties. He said, "If your name's Lipsett and you're in charge here, I have to warn you that if your people had harmed this man you'd have been in bad trouble. He's nearly eighty and the rough handling he's had might have very serious results."

"He brought it on his own head," said Lipsett. "He came in uninvited and started to pull down this man's shack."

"That was stupid, I agree. But he should have been restrained without violence and removed politely."

"Would you have been polite if someone had started to destroy *your* house?" It was the voice of an academic, pitched in the upper register, intellectual, relishing controversy.

"I should have sent for the police," said Jonas curtly. And to Sam, "Help this man back to the car. We'll all feel better when we've had something to eat."

When they got back, Sam cooked breakfast for them. Delamere had no appetite for food, but drank several cups of sugary coffee,

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which seemed to revive him. After breakfast, Sabrina joined them. She had heard the news. She said, "They seem to have learned from their experience at Portree. This time they got their fence up first."

"I've been out of touch with things for a long time," said Delamere. "But when you asked me what action I could take, I seemed to remember—isn't there something called an Action for Nuisance?"

Sabrina fielded this one. "You mean the noise they make at night?"

"And by day."

"Yes, I expect you could found an Action for Nuisance. But it wouldn't do you a lot of good. It'd be a civil action and might take a year or more to get to court. And if you won, you wouldn't get rid of them. You'd simply get an award of damages."

"Oh," said Delamere rather blankly. "Then do you mean there's nothing I can do?"

"Nothing *you* can do, no. But the Council could get quick results if it set about it the right way. Normally, the Court will grant a speedy remedy in a case of aggravated trespass."

When the old man had departed, unhappy but apparently persuaded to rely, for the moment, on Council action, Sabrina said to Jonas, "The present Council may do the right thing, but you're not forgetting that we shall soon have a new one?"

"I *had* forgotten," said Jonas. "When's the election?"

"The first week of April."

"And does it worry us?"

"I'm not sure. I've heard some odd stories."

It was one morning ten days after this conversation that Admiral Fairlie arrived, by appointment, in Jonas's office. He came to the point with naval promptness. He said, "We've got a crisis on our hands. I've been talking to Bob Rattray. Saul Melford has been taken to hospital with suspected thrombosis. They've started exploratory surgery, but however successful they are he won't be back in action for some months."

"Which means that he can't stand at the next election." Jonas was studying a marked plan of Shackleton and its environs. "He's West Ward, isn't he?"

"Correct. And that's not all. Last time John Benson and Bob Rattray picked up the two Town Wards unopposed. Not this time. They've both got a fight on their hands."

"Their opponents being?"

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"Lipsett and Wroke."

Jonas took a minute to absorb this. Then he said, "Are they qualified to stand?"

"Certainly. All they need is six residents to support their nomination. There's been no difficulty about that. They've drummed up quite a following already, particularly among the young. Their pop group, the Strollers, has given two concerts. Both of them were sellouts."

"Yes," said Jonas, "I heard about that." He was making some calculations, none of them reassuring. He said, "What are their real chances?"

"Lipsett won't upset Bob Rattray. Not a chance. But Wroke might oust Benson. He's not wildly popular. And there's more to it than that. You know Desmond Plackett?"

"Insurance broker. Took over the Portsmouth Road Ward when Grandfield was killed in that car accident."

"Right. He's not standing this time. Says he's got too many business commitments. Actually I fancy he's funking it. Thinks he'd be beaten."

Jonas was scribbling names in two columns. He said, "What about the two Branmere Wards?"

"Greenaway and Forbes have held them for some years now. That part's predominantly commercial. I think they're both safe enough. The trouble is, they don't like each other much. On any important proposal, if one of them votes for it the other could easily oppose it."

"What about the Liberties?"

"Florence Fitchett," said the Admiral gloomily. Most men were gloomy when discussing Florence. She might have been described as a supporter of sex equality had it not been apparent that she considered women to be in every respect superior to men.

"You won't rout her out easily," agreed Jonas. "Is that the lot?"

"No. There's the East Ward. In some ways it's the most important. That's where the ragamuffins have pitched their camp."

"Who's the incumbent?"

"Mabel Hanaway. She took it over from her husband, Air Vice Marshal Hanaway, when he died. We don't know yet who's opposing her. We reckon she's got about a fifty-fifty chance. The campers won't be allowed to vote, of course. But they've been doing a lot of canvassing."

"Who for?"

"Not for anyone in particular. Their line is, turn out the old lady

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and vote for someone younger and more with it. No doubt they'll persuade someone to stand before the Lists close on the fourteenth."

"It's going to be an interesting Council, isn't it? Let's look at the worst from your point of view. Suppose Wroke gets in. That means that three sets of wards really cancel each other out—the two Town Wards, the two Branmere Wards, and, let's say, the Liberties and the West Ward. Correct?"

"I agree."

"Then the two other wards are the ones that matter. Portsmouth Road and the East Ward."

"Exactly," said the Admiral. He sounded, thought Jonas, suspiciously pleased. "That's what I've come to discuss. We've formed a Fighting Committee. Our current idea is that I should stand for the East Ward—that's where my house is, incidentally. And you for Portsmouth Road."

"Hey! Steady on. I've told you once already. I came to Shackleton for a quiet life."

"When the ship's in danger, it's all hands to the pumps."

"But is it in danger?"

"You realize that if things go wrong, we shall be landed with a Council that won't move against the campers. They may even give them a lease—then we'll have them with us for keeps. That lovely Dingle turned into a shantytown."

"It makes you think," agreed Jonas. "But please don't bank on me. It's not my line at all."

Next morning he set out on foot to visit Maggs's Farm and discuss mineral rights. It was two miles out of the town. He looked forward to the walk. He thought it might help him to clear his mind. The sky was still blue, but it was no longer a soft blue. There was a hard edge to it. The weather seemed to be changing.

Maggs confirmed this. He said, "Thermometer dropped five points last night. I wasn't sorry. If we're going to have a frost, better now than later. If it comes in May, you can say goodbye to your fruit."

When they had finished their business and Jonas was leaving, Maggs said, "Did I hear you was to be our new Council member?"

"If you know that," said Jonas, "you know more than I do."

"You'll get a lot of votes if you do stand, I can promise you that. You know who'd be against you?"

"No."

"Chap called Partridge. You've heard of him?"

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"I remember the name vaguely. Isn't he a naturalist?"

"Something like that. He sent us all a bit of paper. I've got it here, if you'd like to read it."

The circular was adorned with the photograph of a young man wearing hornrimmed glasses and an expression of overwhelming seriousness.

"When I opened it," said Maggs, "I thought it was an advert for a patent medicine or something like that."

"He does look a bit constipated," agreed Jonas.

"I was going to throw it away, but my wife said, 'Better read it, it may be important.' I'm glad I did. Some of the things he says—well, I ask you!"

Jonas scanned Mr. Partridge's electioneering manifesto with interest. He saw that he called himself The Countryside Candidate. His message was that the land belonged to everyone. It must *not* be monopolized by the farming fraternity. Some of it now under cultivation must be allowed to return to its natural state as a habitation for wild life. Footpaths must be carefully preserved and added to where necessary.

In view of the fact that the majority of the voters in the Portsmouth Road Ward were farmers, Jonas agreed that this bold statement of young Mr. Partridge's views would be unlikely to win him many votes.

"You realize," he said, "that most of the things he's proposing couldn't be done by any District Council, whoever got on it. They can't open new footpaths and they can't change the law."

"No saying what people like that can do once you let 'em in," said Maggs gloomily. "You put your name forward and we'll all vote for you. It'll be a walk-over."

Jonas thought about it as he made his way home. The fact that he would probably win the seat made the idea somehow even less attractive.

He wished he had brought a scarf and gloves—it was certainly much colder.

When he got to the office, Claire said, "You've got a caller. I don't know if you want to see him, but he seems keen to see you."

"Has he got a name?"

"It's Raymond Lipsett."

"Oh. Did he say what he wanted?"

"Like most people who come to see you, I imagine he wants help."

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She said this so flatly that it sounded like a rebuke. Jonas looked at her for a moment, started to say something, changed his mind, and moved off into his office. Lipsett got up politely enough, but did not offer to shake hands. When they were both seated, Jonas said, "What can I do for you?"

Lipsett pushed a piece of paper across the desk. Jonas saw that it was a writ issued in the Brighton Crown Court, naming Lipsett as defendant, in a representative capacity, in an action by the Council for aggravated trespass. Much what he had expected. He said, "Do I gather that you want me to represent you?"

"That was my idea. It's the sort of thing you do, isn't it?"

"It's the sort of thing I do, yes. But I don't see that I can act for you in this particular case."

"Why not?"

"Well, to start with, I happen to be acting for Delamere. He's considering an action for assault against the people who manhandled him."

"So what? He's not a party to this action."

"True. But you must see that it would make it awkward for me. There are other solicitors in Shackleton—"

"Thank you. I've had some. When I called on Porter and Merriman, I wasn't allowed to see the Senior Partner—apparently he's reserved for people who matter. I was interviewed by a young man who talked as if he'd got a mouth full of plums. He said, 'Sorry, old boy. Rayly it's not the sort of thing we handle, acherly.' So I went on to see R. & L. Sykes. There I did get through to a partner."

"Ronald Sykes?"

"I imagine so. He was at least honest. He said that if he took the case he'd lose half his clients. Do I take it you're going to say the same thing?"

"No. I've got more clients than I want. And, anyway, I'm three-quarters retired. I shall probably retire altogether at the end of next year."

"Then what are *your* reasons, might one ask?"

Temperature heating up a bit, thought Jonas. Better get it over quickly. He said, "I don't want to act in this matter. Simple as that. Anyway, you'll find plenty of firms in Brighton who'll be pleased to help you."

"Shall I really? Then let me tell you something. Most probably I shan't need anyone at all. Because this case is one which isn't coming

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off!" He picked up the copy of the writ, tore it neatly into four pieces, and deposited them in Jonas's wastepaper basket.

"What makes you think that?"

"Your local rag has conducted a straw poll. It gives us a majority on the Council. I can assure you that the first thing the new Council will do is to abandon this stupid action, and the second will be to grant us a long lease."

"Won't you be a bit uncomfortable, particularly when the temperature's below freezing point?"

"Be your age. We shan't take a lease of that place. We've got our eyes on a nice piece of ground behind the Front. The Lammas, I believe it's called. I've got a number of friends who'll join us there. Young keen people with a bit of spunk in them. Maybe they'll kick up a shindy, but it's what this place wants. It needs waking up, kicking into the Twentieth Century." The words were tumbling out with such force that they seemed to be generating their own heat. Lipsett's face, as much as could be seen of it behind its camouflage of hair, was scarlet and his eyes were snapping. "Maybe the old women of both sexes who have been roosting here won't like it. Their bad luck. Let them fly away somewhere else, we shan't miss them. The future belongs to youth."

As he paused for breath, Jonas said, "In fact, you're using Shackleton as a cuspidor."

"Come again?"

"Something you can spit at."

Lipsett looked at him for a long moment. Jonas thought, Now he really is going to burst. Or perhaps he'll throw something at me. An inkpot and a desk calendar seemed the most likely missiles.

In fact, Lipsett rose to his feet, said, "I can see it's a waste of time talking to you," swung on his heel, and went out, closing the door quietly behind him. Jonas heard his feet in the hallway. Something was said to Claire. Then the front door shut and his footsteps went off, crunching the ice on the front path.

When Claire came in, Jonas was sitting perfectly still. She said, "Not a very successful interview, I gather."

"On the contrary," said Jonas. "Decisive. Could you get me Admiral Fairlie's number?"

When she came back with it, he said, "He's succeeded in making up my mind for me. I'm going to ask the Admiral to rustle me up six supporters. I'm proposing to stand for the Portsmouth Road Ward. I don't know the first thing about it. I shall rely on you to help me."

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"I'm afraid," said Claire slowly, "that won't be possible. I've got a lot of canvassing to do myself."

"For Philip Wroke?"

"No. I'm standing for the East Ward."

After she had left, Jonas sat for a long time staring at the closed door.

After thinking the matter over, Jonas decided not to distribute a circular. The one sent round by his opponent must have lost him more votes than it gained. He decided to confine himself to a modified form of house-to-house canvassing. Maggs had produced a list of residents, indicating the cases in which not much persuasion would be needed and those in which he might have to deploy arguments.

That morning, he was proposing to visit a corn chandler who had his shop in the tiny village of Moorhampton in the extreme north of his area and who was reputed to be something of a radical. All that week the sky had maintained its steely blue color and it had been getting steadily colder. The thermometer on the previous evening had recorded a record seventeen degrees of frost. As he set out in the car, Jonas noticed a change.

It was warmer. Clouds like dirty cotton wool were billowing up from the southeast. As he reached the lane which led to Moorhampton, the snow began to fall. Jonas half thought of turning back, but he was now so near his destination that he decided to push on. He found the corn chandler an agreeable enough man who seemed to grasp the advantages of voting for him. When he was leaving, the man said, "Better not waste much time, squire, if you want to get back to Shackleton."

"You think the snow will block the road?"

"It's the ground underneath, see. It's frozen so hard the snow can't sink in. Like as not we'll be cut off by this evening."

It was a difficult drive. The snow was now coming down so thickly that he needed to keep the wipers moving at double speed to clear it and drifts were already forming and threatening to block the road. Fortunately, it was downhill most of the way and he managed to keep the car moving, with two hair-raising skids where a patch of ice showed through the snow. When he got to the town, the houses gave some shelter and he reached home, tucked his car away thankfully in the garage, and went inside.

He found Sabrina and Claire, who lodged two or three streets

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away, with their coats on and their scarves over their heads, ready to depart.

"No clients and none expected," said Claire. "Sabrina and I are getting home while the going's good."

"If it goes on like this," said Jonas, "you'd better stay at home tomorrow. Sam and I can cope quite well by ourselves for a day or two."

"An unexpectedly heavy fall of snow on the South Coast," said the wireless that evening, in the cheerful voice it reserved for such announcements, "has brought chaos to many areas. Worst hit have been isolated farms on the coastal side of the South Downs. If the snow continues, emergency plans are being put in hand by the Authorities, involving use of troops and helicopters. However, the snow has arrived so late in the year that the experts are of the opinion that it will not lie for any length of time."

"Experts!" said Sam. He and Jonas were sitting in front of a roaring fire in the office. "If they're all that expert, why didn't they tell us this was coming?"

"I'm not complaining," said Jonas. He added a generous tot of whisky to each of their glasses. "I don't mind if it keeps it up for a day or so. Makes a nice break."

Next morning it was still snowing, but spasmodically. When it stopped and the wind from the southwest parted the clouds, a sky of the palest blue showed for a few moments. Then the clouds closed in again.

Jonas spent the day in his office catching up with some neglected paperwork. Sam cooked lunch for both of them and retired to his quarters for his afternoon nap. Jonas worked on steadily until the premature twilight forced him to switch on his table lamp.

At that moment the telephone rang. It was Claire. She said, "I thought you might like to know that I've heard from Wroke. He rang me from a call box. He's moved his caravan up out of the Dingle. It took some doing. Luckily, he got some help from a farmer with a tractor."

"What about the others? Are they moving out?"

"Don't sound so hopeful," said Claire. "No. Philip says they're staying put. Actually, they're pretty well protected by the banks on either side."

"As long as they've got enough to eat."

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"Oh, they're well provisioned. And used to looking after themselves. More so than most people."

Jonas thought she was probably right about that.

At eleven o'clock that night, he was having his evening nightcap in front of the fire with Sam when the front doorbell rang. Sam ambled out into the hall and came back with Francis Delamere. The old man was wearing a cloak and hood. As Sam helped him out of them, Jonas noticed with some surprise that although they were wet through, there was no sign of snow on them.

"Do I gather," he said, "that it's stopped snowing?"

"The snow stopped at dusk. The thermometer's five degrees above zero already, and going up. And it's been raining for the last three hours. You see the importance of that?"

"I can see that it must *be* important," said Jonas, "or you wouldn't have come all this way on a night like this to discuss it." He had a suspicion that the events of the last few days might have affected the old man's mind. He added, "Wouldn't it have been simpler if you'd telephoned? Whatever the problem, there's nothing much anyone can do about it at this time of night."

"When you talk like that," said Delamere, and there was the snap in his voice of a teacher addressing a backward class, "it's clear that you have no idea at all of what we're facing."

"Which is?"

"Disaster. Unless we can clear them out tonight, when the sun gets up tomorrow it's more than likely that there won't be a man, woman, or child alive in that camp."

Jonas stared at him. If the man was mad, it was a very convincing sort of madness. He said, "I suppose you know what you're talking about. I haven't got your expertise in these matters. Could you please explain what you're afraid of?"

Delamere took a deep breath. He said, "Do you remember what happened at Linton?"

"Linton. That's on the south coast of Devon, isn't it? I do remember they had a sort of flood."

"A sort of flood! It destroyed a complete village. The conditions were identical. First a frost, which hardened the ground. Then heavy snow all along the south slopes of Dartmoor. Then a sudden thaw. The melted snow was unable to soak into the ground. It had to go somewhere. It went down the bed of the Linn stream in a tidal wave. Now do you see?"

Jonas was a cautious man who disliked jumping to conclusions.

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He started to say, "There's no real certainty about any of this—" when, to his surprise, Sam interrupted him.

He said, in the voice of one who at last sees the answer to a puzzle, "Tilshead."

"That's right," said Delamere. "The Tilshead disaster of 1897. You remember that."

"I can't say I remember it personally," said Sam, "but when I was doing my National Service in the Gunners, we was up at Larkhill and I saw that memorial thing. When I read what was on it, I couldn't hardly credit it. The Till's a tiny little stream normally—sort of thing you could walk across without getting the water over your boots—but one night, it seems, it came roaring down the main street. They show the tidemark twelve feet above the street level. A lot of the cottages had to be rebuilt. They had a public subscription. That's what this memorial's about."

While Sam had been speaking, Jonas had been making up his mind. He said, "Very well, I'm prepared to agree that there's a chance you're right. The difficulty is what we're going to do about it. If you or I go along to the camp and tell them they've got to clear out before morning, you can guess what they'll say: You're just trying to do what they did at Portree—turn us out and keep us out."

"They might listen to you."

"Not in a hundred years. Lipsett knows exactly what I think of him. No. There's only one chance. If we can convince Wroke, he might convince them. Claire told me he's moved his caravan. I'll try to find out where he's put it—" He was dialing a number as he spoke. There was a long pause at the other end. "I expect she's in bed and asleep by now."

It was a woman's voice, not Claire's, that answered. The landlady, Jonas guessed. She said, "Yes—who is it?" Her voice sounded more anxious than irritated.

"I'm so sorry to bother you," said Jonas, "but I must have a word with Miss Rayner."

"Oh, dear. Are you the police?"

"No. I'm her employer. Mr. Pickett."

"I've been so worried. She went out hours ago and she hasn't come back."

"I think I know where she's gone," said Jonas. "Leave it to me." He rang off before the landlady could say anything else. "Ten to one she's with Wroke now. I wish we knew where he's parked his caravan."

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"I fancy I saw it as I came past," said Delamere. "There's a lay-by where the path from the Dingle comes out onto the main road."

"Right," said Jonas. "You drive, Sam."

Philip Wroke said, "Yes," and "I see," as Delamere repeated his story. "It did occur to me that there might be danger, and Claire and I were sitting up in case any salvage was called for. I must say we didn't anticipate the sort of disaster you're talking about. We saw the level of the Shackle stream might rise rather sharply, that's all."

"I think," said Jonas, "that we've got to rely on Mr. Delamere's expertise. Could you have a word with Lipsett?"

They had found Wroke's caravan without difficulty and were sitting in front of a glowing stove.

Claire said, "He'd listen to you, Philip."

"He might."

"We've got to try, anyway."

"Yes," said Wroke, getting up with a sigh. "I suppose we'd better all go down to lend a hand in case he does agree to evacuate the camp, but to start with I think you'd better keep in the background and let me do the talking."

When he and Claire had put on mackintoshes and sou'westers, they started together down the slippery path that ran beside the stream. Claire and Wroke linked arms. Jonas and Delamere anchored themselves to Sam. They found the entrance blocked with a tangled lump of barbed wire, but no guards. Sam heaved the barricade aside and they went in.

It was now nearly two o'clock, but there were lights showing in one or two of the tents. Outside one of them a man was digging a trench to lead the melted snow and rainwater away from his shack. He looked up at them as they passed, but said nothing.

There was a light in Lipsett's caravan. When he answered Wroke's knock, they saw that he was fully dressed. He saw Claire standing behind Wroke and said genially, "Come in, both of you. You look like drowned kittens." Then he spotted the other three and said, in a very different tone of voice, "What is this? A deputation?"

"Sort of," said Wroke. "If you let us in, we'll explain."

After hesitating for a moment, Lipsett said, "There's not a lot of room. But all right, squeeze in if you must. But if you've got anything to say, please say it quickly. I've been spending the early part of the

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night helping people dig ditches and I wouldn't mind getting a few hours' sleep."

The caravan was smaller than Wroke's and it was a tight squeeze. Wroke said, "I'm afraid we've got to evacuate the camp, Raymond."

"I guessed it would be something like that. Perhaps you'll be good enough to tell me why we should do any such thing."

"Mr. Delamere is the expert. I'd rather you heard it from him direct."

For the third time that night, the old man spoke. Possibly because he had said it all twice before, or possibly because he was tired, it struck Jonas as less convincing. Lipsett listened with offensive patience and said at the end, "Is that all?"

"Enough surely for precautionary measures," said Wroke. But he seemed less certain than he had been.

"Such as clearing everyone out of the camp," said Lipsett with a smile.

"Well—"

"Then let me tell you a few facts. We have not neglected the possibility of a flood. The level of the stream has been monitored every few hours. Possibly as a result of the surface ice melting, the level has risen by two feet. But when it was inspected an hour ago, the level was actually down."

Wroke said, "But don't you see, Raymond, it's not the stream itself—"

Lipsett disregarded the interruption. He said, "Also we have listened to the weather reports. They were encouraging. A warm front is predicted and by tomorrow evening most of the snow will be gone. So now, if you don't mind—"

Delamere then managed to surprise them. He didn't attempt debate. He said, "I have some fifty yards of very good rope. It can be attached to something on each side. Have you any objection if we run it through the camp?"

The stark practicality of this suggestion seemed to affect Lipsett more than any argument. For a moment he hesitated, then he said, "Very well, but no tricks."

It took some time to thread the rope under the barbed wire on each side and attach it. They had anchored it to a tree on the west side, and on the other side to one of the Council benches which was firmly set in a concrete base. After that, Wroke and Claire went back to Wroke's caravan and the other three climbed the steps to

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Delamere's cottage, where they dozed away the remaining hours of the night in chairs in front of the fire.

Jonas was the first up. He came out of the house as a rim of the sun was showing over the roofs of the town. The warmth of the air had already acted on the sodden ground and the whole of the Dingle was filled with a white mist, through which a row of tent poles poked out like the masts of a sunken ship. Looking across the top of the mist bank, he could see Wroke and Claire sitting together on the bench by the far end of the rope. He heard Claire laughing at something Wroke had said.

It was a cheerful and a reassuring scene. The hermit's fears had turned out to be nothing but fantasies. Nevertheless, what they had tried to do was sensible.

Delamere and Sam had joined him and they were standing together when they heard it. It was a rumbling, grumbling sound, like the opening notes of an avalanche as it breaks free and gathers speed—then a series of sharp cracks, like the opening of an artillery barrage. One or two of the campers just below them looked out of their tents. A woman screamed. Then it hit them.

It was not a flood, it was a tidal wave—ten feet high, frothing grey on the top, brown underneath. It picked up one of the caravans and smashed it into the wire at the bottom, carrying a section of the fence away with it. As the wave subsided for a moment, their horrified eyes could see heads bobbing in the water, tangles of grey hair, men and women, encumbered by the flapping canvas, trying to claw their way up to the safety of the banks.

Sam had launched himself down the rope. He had already dragged two men clear and had grabbed a girl who was crawling under the wire when the second wave hit them. It was higher than the first and more terrible, carrying a flotsam of broken stuff. A hen coop, half a telegraph pole, the roof of a shed. And bodies. Animals floating on their backs and bundles of rags and human clothing at which Jonas dared not look.

The second wave uprooted what was left of the fence and swung it like a deadly flail across the camp. Frightful though the result of this was, it did at least clear an obstruction from the sides. Sam, at times up to his neck in the water, at times completely submerged, had grabbed two more men and one woman with a child in her arms.

Then the third wave was on them. Higher than the last and awe-

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some in its power, it swept through the little valley like a scythe through corn, carrying everything in its path as it raced to the sea.

As Jonas stood, aghast and helpless, he heard, seeming to come from under the grey waters of the Channel, the sound of a bell. A single piercing note which went on for some seconds as the water level in the Dingle slowly sank.

"There's a lot to do," said the Admiral. He spoke in a brisk and businesslike way, but the horror of what they had seen was still at the back of all their minds, though it was four weeks in the past. He added, "Thank God we've got a Council that can tackle it."

It was the last week in April. The elections had brought few surprises. Rattray and Benson, Jonas and the Admiral, Greenaway and Forbes formed an impregnable center block, able and willing to undertake the work of reconstruction.

Nine of the campers had been dragged from the flood, six of them by Sam. Three more, strong swimmers, had kept their heads. Allowing themselves to be carried out to sea, they had struggled to land a mile down the coast. Seventy, including Lipsett, had died in the flood. To this total had to be added two men, two women, and four children from the farms which had been swept away higher up the valley.

A relief fund had been started and the public response, as so often in such cases, was overwhelming.

"Wroke's a good man," said the Admiral. "Though he didn't win a seat on the Council, he's agreed to head our Appeal Committee. Do I gather, by the way, that he and Miss Rayner are engaged?"

"It's high time they announced it," said Jonas, "they've been living together in that caravan for the last month."

"Glad she won the seat. Maybe she'll be able to keep Florence Fitchett quiet. I'm afraid your practice has suffered."

"It hasn't suffered," said Jonas. "It no longer exists. I've decided to retire. Sabrina has joined R. & L. Sykes and they were delighted to have her. The firms have been amalgamated. Sykes and Jonas, the new outfit is to be called, so that at least my name will be remembered."

"You've had a pretty good run," said the Admiral thoughtfully.

Jonas nodded, but it was not what he wanted to talk about. It was the first time since the disaster that he had got the Admiral to himself.

He said, "When it all happened, just exactly where were you?"

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"On my roof, as I often am in the early morning, using my telescope. I was too far away to help, but I was perfectly placed to see what happened. Incidentally, I've put up Sam's name for a Royal Humane Society medal."

"Well deserved," said Jonas absently. "What I really wanted to ask you was whether, just after that third wave came—the final one that swept everything out to sea—did you hear anything?"

The Admiral looked at him curiously. "What sort of thing?"

"Well—it sounded like a bell. Sam and Delamere heard it, too."

"You must have been thinking of that old story. That if another disaster threatened Shackleton, the bells of the church under the sea would ring again."

"Something of the sort."

"I didn't hear anything. But the wind was in your direction, not mine. You do realize that even if you did hear it, there might have been a perfectly natural explanation. The old church is still somewhere there, under the waves. Its bells may still be hanging. A heavy piece of wood, brought down by the force of the flood, might have struck against the bell—"

"Yes," said Jonas. "I suppose it could have been that."

But he didn't believe it.

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THERE IS NO CHARGE FOR THE ZIP CODE: please use it when ordering merchandise from classified advertisements. You'll receive faster delivery.

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HIGH Profits T-shirts, Caps, Inexpensive transfer machines, supplies Press, Box 22809(BC), Tampa, FL 33623.

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CREATE A NEW IDENTITY. Untraceable Foolproof. Confidential. ID4, P.O. Box 25768 St. Louis, MO 63136.

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YOUR HOROSCOPE With Pages of ex planations. Send Birth Date, Place, Time $19.95: Tiger Lady, Box 2308, Dearborn M 48123.

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SAVE MONEY TOO— BY READING and ANSWERING THESE CLASSIFIED ADS

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PERSONAL—Cont'd

BEAUTIFUL, ENGLISH SPEAKING, FILIPINAS want men of all ages as Life-partners. VIDEOS AVAILABLE. PAL, 51 BLANCA, CO 811230084.

NATIONWIDE Singles Magazine. Send Name, Address, Age. Send No Money. Exchange, 1817 Welton, #1580, Denver, Colorado 80202.

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CHRISTIAN SINGLES OUTREACH. Local/Worldwide—Phone/Mail Introductions. Free information/Fast Service. Write: Box 9020-EQ, Van Nuys, CA 91409.

SAVE Money on every long distance call. SASE: CFL, P.O. Box 946, Norristown, PA 9404.

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FREE FILM 250 rolls Kodak Film. Any size, any exposure. FREE details. Omega Enterprises, 448 N. 39th St., Dept. 4, Milwaukee, WI 53208.

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Each combination is designed to give your ad the largest audience available.

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ELLERY QUEEN

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING ORDER FORM

Send to **ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE**
Classified Advertising Department Suite 1401
380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017

15 WORD MINIMUM
Only $48.00 for 15 Words or Less
$3.20 each additional word
Capitalized words add—40¢ per word
SAVE 15% WITH 3 CONSECUTIVE MONTHS SAME COPY ORDER

DEADLINE: Copy and payment must be in by the 5th day of the third preceding month for issue in which ad is to appear.

(PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE)

YOUR NAME_____

FIRM (NAME IN AD)_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY_____ **STATE**_____ **ZIP**_____

PHONE:_____ **DATE:**_____

YOUR SIGNATURE_____

_____ Words at $3.20 each $ . . . . .

_____ Capitalized word at 40¢ each _____

Total amount for 1 ad $ _____

15% Savings with 3 Consecutive Months Discount

(a) Multiply one ad total $_____ x 3 = $ _____

(b) Multiply total amount on above line by x .85

(c) Total amount for 3 ads $ _____

(Example: One 15 word ad $48.00 x 3 months = $144.00 x .85 = $122.40)

$_____ is enclosed for _____ insertion(s) in the _____ issue(s) _____ Heading

(FOR ADDITIONAL WORDS ATTACH SEPARATE SHEET)

(1) **$48.00**	(2) **$48.00**	(3) **$48.00**	(4) **$48.00**	(5) **$48.00**
(6) **$48.00**	(7) **$48.00**	(8) **$48.00**	(9) **$48.00**	(10) **$48.00**
(11) **$48.00**	(12) **$48.00**	(13) **$48.00**	(14) **$48.00**	(15) **$48.00**
(16) **$51.20**	(17) **$54.40**	(18) **$57.60**	(19) **$60.80**	(20) **$64.00**
(21) **$67.20**	(22) **$70.40**	(23) **$73.60**	(24) **$76.80**	(25) **$80.00**
(26) **$83.20**	(27) **$86.40**	(28) **$89.60**	(29) **$92.80**	(30) **$96.00**

HOW TO COUNT WORDS: Name and address must be included in counting the number of Words in your ad. Each initial or number counts as 1 word. Mark Holly, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017 7 WORDS. *Zip codes are not counted. Phone # 2 Words.* Symbols used as keys are charged for. City or State count as 1 word each. Garden City, New York 2 words. Abbreviations such as C.O.D., F.O.B., P.O., U.S.A. 7x10, 35mm count as 1 word. (P.O. Box 145 count as 3 words) Webster's International Unabridged Dictionary will be used as our authority for spelling, compound words, hyphens, abbreviations, etc. **Please make checks payable to ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE.**

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11 *NEW* stories—including

ROBERT TWOHY (about a crime-fiction writer)

PETER LOVESEY (about a honeymoon in Corfu)

EDWARD D. HOCH (about Michael Vlado)

plus 2 Christmas reprints by ROBERTSON DAVIES and T. S. STRIBLING and your ballot for the 1988 EQMM Readers Award

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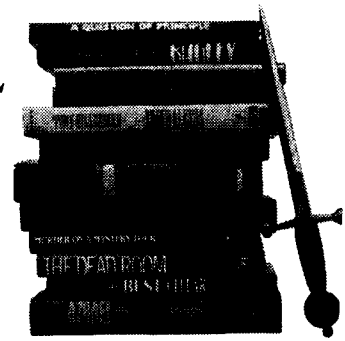

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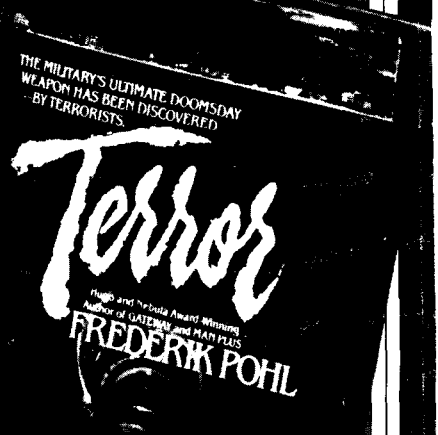
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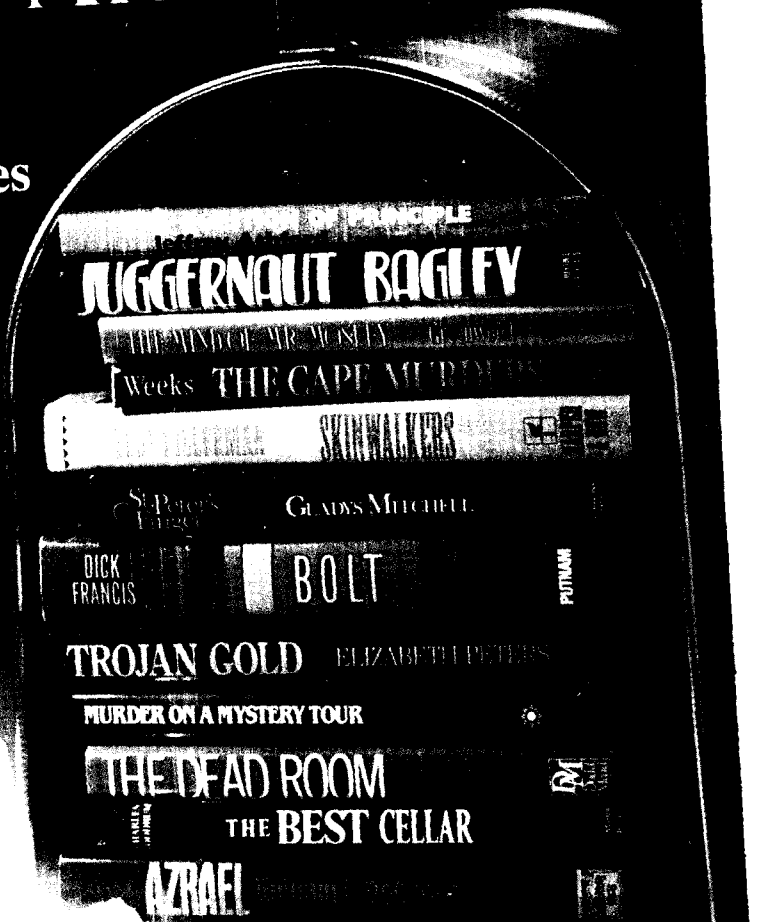

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